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OUT OF HER SPHERE.

BY

MRS. EILOART,

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE'S DISCIPLINE," "JUST A WOMAN,"
"FROM THISTLES—GRAPES," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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OUT OF HER SPHERE.

CHAPTER I.

“OH, MY LORD, BEWARE OF JEALOUSY!”

A CHILL evening in the middle of September, with a keen wind, that seemed to speak already of the coming winter, blowing from the great North Sea, over the long bare sea coast, which, unbroken by a single cliff, was so monotonous as almost to be grand in its sameness, one long level of sand stretching along for miles. There were lights in the distance from the town, and in the dim grey of the evening the ships that were coming, or going, to all parts of the world could be discerned,—

there was life behind and before—but on the long low level of sand all seemed hushed and still : not even a sea bird flying across the bare dreary expanse. The children who made hillocks or graves of sand in the daytime, were long since asleep. The few visitors who in the season sought Wearmouth, had been driven in to their lodgings an hour ago by the chill wind. The faint murmur of the waves, as they flowed in one after the other on the line of sand, making fresh ripples in its margin, and washing out those they had made the day before, mingled with the little stir and hum of the town ; but from the sands themselves no voice or cry arose. All was a bare, still solitude, broken only by the figure of a man pacing the sands with quick restless steps.

He was a tall, angular figure wrapt in a light overcoat. With his head inclined slightly forward, and his hands folded behind his back, he was, apparently, absorbed in

thought, and that, to judge by the knitted brow, and the workings of the mouth, not of the pleasantest kind. Not a handsome man at all, and yet one whom it would have been impossible to call plain, or pass over as insignificant—a face that might have suited either a martyr at the stake, or the fanatic who had sent him there. A high, narrow forehead, thin lips, ominously compressed ; a sallow complexion, browned and tanned by exposure to the weather ; sunken cheeks, and a square, massive under-jaw, that would have been more in keeping with a stouter framework and a fuller countenance. He was not above forty, but the thin, dark hair was already streaked with grey, and there were lines on the face not often seen in the prime of life. There was brain, there was mind in it ; but brain restless, and troubled ; mind, narrowed, if not distorted. Just now, the face was that of an intensely miserable man, suffering under a grievous wrong, real or imaginary ; but at no time

could it have been that of a happy one. The elements of happiness—the easy temper, the hopefulness, the buoyant elasticity, that are innate to some constitutions, had never entered into that of the Reverend Harold Thornton.

He was not happy ; and just now he thought that he had good reason for not being so. There was a fiend—the very ugliest, perhaps, of them all—keeping pace with him on those lonely sands, and whispering its venomous breathings in his ear. He thought himself wronged, aggrieved—where wrong would be irreparable—where injury would be past forgiveness. He had little enough to build upon, but the fancies and dreams that a man with a morbid turn of mind so easily torments himself with—ghosts of his own raising—but these were enough for his own misery, enough to make him curse the day that he had been beguiled by a woman's face, and placed his honour in a woman's keeping.

Up and down the sands he went. The tide was now coming in, and it swept over his feet. Mechanically he moved further from the waters, but still continued his restless pacing. If only so he could lay the fiend that was tormenting him! that kept recalling looks and tones, words of defiance and of anger, that a wise man would have done well to have forgotten.

He had no *right* to think himself so injured. Once for all, this is no tale of sinful passion to be painted with a sensuous hand, dwelt upon lovingly in glowing colours, till the sin so tenderly condemned is made to look a fairer thing than the virtue overthrown. It is a story of a man's mistake, and a woman's folly—of two miserable creatures whose mutual misapprehensions wrought, as is so often the case, as much wretchedness, to one, at least, as any amount of criminality could have done.

The cold wind became chillier yet; but the Reverend Harold Thornton did not heed

it. At last the rain, which had been collecting itself in the clouds overhead, fell heavily ; and even he, pre-occupied as he was in his misery, could not but feel it. He gave a little shudder.

“ There is nothing for it but *home* ;” and the bitterness with which he uttered the word told fully how unhome-like home was to him. He stepped on over the long stretch of sand, and then turned inland down a short lane that led from the coast, past a few houses of an inferior kind, then by a small grey church, lying back from a little street, and so towards his own house, which looked full upon the churchyard, and was only divided from it by a narrow foot-way and an iron railing.

It was not a pleasant look-out for a dwelling-house. Although the churchyard had been long disused, still there were the grass-grown graves, the moss-covered tombstones, with their more or less legible inscriptions, not half-a-dozen yards from the

windows of the rooms where the inhabitants of the Rectory carried on their daily life. It was an unseemly, irreverent jumbling of the living and the dead, only no one thought of it as such : even Mrs. Thornton, who had complained of the ghastliness of her neighbourhood at first, had become used to it now ; and as to her husband, he had never given the matter a thought.

The Rectory was a long, low building, one storey high, much too large for the living, which was only valued at one hundred and fifty pounds a year. But some of the former occupants had augmented their income, in spite of the unpleasant proximity of the churchyard, by taking pupils. The present rector did not choose to do this ; his income, he would have said, whatever his wife might have done, was sufficient for all his simple needs : and his parochial duties claimed all his time ; but, in truth, if the Reverend Harold had turned his thoughts to tuition, it would have been a

bad thing for himself, but a very much worse for the boys.

But it was a dreary house for two people and their two maids to live in, with large, vacant rooms, and wide, bare corridors. Ample fires and merry voices and steps might have made the place endurable; as it was, the low, dark rooms were pervaded by a sense of dreary chilliness. If a mouse squeaked, or a rat gnawed behind the panels, the maids were ready to cry out it was a ghost; and their mistress was almost justified in saying, that no ghost of any sense but would look for better quarters. Only the gloom, and the chilliness, and the dulness, never weighed upon the master, to whom the very quietness and isolation of the Rectory and living had been one great attraction to induce him to leave a larger and more stirring sphere of action.

The parish of St. Hilda was an offshoot of the town of Wearmouth. Only twenty years ago it had been a village by itself; but the town had crept on

to it, or it had crept on to the town, after the manner in which London links itself to its outlying suburbs. The connection had not increased the prosperity of the parish. One poor, shabby little street after another had grown longer, as the boatmen and fishermen of the town increased in number; but scarcely any dwellers of a better class came into St. Hilda, which was now the most populous, and the poorest part of Wearmouth.

The inhabitants—with the exception of the few small shopkeepers who supplied the wants of the rest—got their living, in one way or another, from the sea. The streets were narrow, with raised footways, paved with small stones. They had been fairly picturesque, with their red tiled roofs and brown plastered fronts, till they were elbowed by the four-roomed, square, brick tenements of the new-comers into the parish. Now, the place was crowded out of whatever quaint old-world prettiness it might once have

possessed. It was homely, sordid, and unattractive to most eyes; but Harold Thornton, when he elected to live there, had seen nothing of that in it, only looking on it as a spot to which he had been called; and where he should find the work which the Lord had given him to do.

He was in no fit frame for such work to-night. What were the cares and troubles of his parish, spiritual or otherwise, to a man wholly occupied with one absorbing conflict of his own? Just now he was—as he owned afterwards to himself—selfishly, wickedly, wrapped up in the contemplation of his own hurt, and had little thought or care for the hurts of any of his flock—let them be wounded as sorely as they might.

And thinking of one's own wounds always makes them smart the sorer. The Rector of St. Hilda was a jealous man, and he had brooded over the few causes he had, or fancied he had, for jealousy, till he was as thoroughly miserable as he could very

well be. And to-night, on his return home, instead of going up to his own door, and demanding entrance in the ordinary way, he must prowl and peer about, listening and watching, like a spy, even on his own threshold.

He heard his wife's voice. She was at the piano, singing her best and loudest. She had a clear, full soprano, well cultivated; and to-night she was exerting it to the utmost. The song was one that called forth all her powers, and her execution and tones were altogether very different from those of amateurs in general. Was she singing like this in defiance of him? They had parted in anger. How could she sit down to her piano and dash away song after song like this? If she had cared for his anger, been grieved at his displeasure, she would never have done it. Who would but a false, heartless woman on the high road to that destruction against which he had warned her, and which warning she had so fiercely

resented? That was what he said to himself, clutching his fingers nervously, as the rich, full notes of the song floated on the air. The drawing-room window was a small bay. The centre blind was drawn down, but the one on the side nearest to him was only lowered half way. Something impelled him to step forward and look at his wife—see if her face was as untroubled as her voice. He had to stoop a little to do so when he neared the window ; but he saw her plainly enough. The sight was hardly worth the stooping for. She was, as I have said, at the piano. The song had ceased just as he neared the window, and her hands were wandering carelessly over the keys, while her face was turned back, with the eyes fixed full on the very man against whom he had warned her—the man who he believed would injure him in such sort as can never be forgiven—the man of whom he had told her that she would do well to stand in greater dread than of any living—the man whom of all

others she should have shunned with the loathing that a good woman ought to have of all things evil—here he was, where the looker-on had said that he should never come, by the fireside which he believed him capable of polluting ; by the hearth whose dishonour he credited him with contemplating.

It was not a pleasant sight for a husband—still a great many men might have looked on it without drawing from it the conclusions that the Rev. Harold did. Mrs. Thornton was evidently indulging in a flirtation—it was certain that she liked the society of the gentleman she was with, and that he was very well content with hers.

He was standing by the piano, with his hand on the pages of the music book. Mr. Thornton could not see his face, but he could hers ; she was looking up with far more expression in her great dark eyes than there was any occasion to throw into them, and he was bending forward with the

attitude of a man who was drinking in eagerly everything those eyes were saying. The lamp-light shone full upon her, and showed a very handsome woman, certainly past her *première jeunesse*, but perhaps all the better able to make the most of the many attractions that yet remained to her. At this date Mrs. Thornton must have been at least two and thirty, but might have been taken for three or four years more. There was a worn, weary look about the face even at its best, and perhaps just now it was at its best, for she was fond of singing, liked an appreciative listener, and, of all listeners, perhaps the gentleman now bending over her the best of any. She must have known troubles in her time, this woman, to have aged as she had done ; but still it was a handsome face, if a hard, and not very lovable one. The features were good—classically perfect in outline, but the complexion was of a dead, set pallor. Now and then, when she thought it quite safe to do

so, Mrs. Thornton rouged, but she had not done so to-night. The lips were rich and full, lighting up with their bright colour the lower part of the face. The hair was luxuriant and of a jet black—this, and the intense darkness and brilliancy of the eyes, the thick arched eyebrows, the deep colour of the lips, made the face, in spite of its customary pallor, a striking one at the first glance.

But it was not a pleasant face—not the face of a happy woman—not at all the face that you would expect to see gracing the inside of a rectory, or presiding at a clergyman's table. It was the face of a woman who might be innocent and pure in deed and act, but who, possibly through some evil chance which she could not help, had seen more than a woman should of the dark side of life—whose eyes had been, perhaps, compelled to look on evil things, but who could never be the same as if she had not so looked. If you had met with

such a face behind the scenes of a theatre, or in the circus of a travelling equestrian company, it would have seemed, especially when lit up by excitement, just in its element—it was utterly out of place in the parsonage of a quiet country town.

She was well-dressed, and her hair was elaborately arranged. Mrs. Thornton spent a great deal of time, but not too much money, over her toilet. She was always in the fashion, too, and to-night she almost lit up the dull sombre drawing-room, where not an article but the piano was less than forty years old, with her pretty muslin and bright ribands—her dress was perhaps a little too showy, but the general effect was always good. Most people thought so at least. As to Mr. Thornton, his wife's fondness for dress was perhaps one of the causes that had led to his present unhappiness. He cared so little, as he had often told her, for such matters, and she thought so much of them; if dress was valueless in

his eyes why should she study it so much for the eyes of others? As he looked upon her now, her floating draperies and shining hair were so many sins in his eyes; he forgot to ask himself how it was they had once been so many charms, and yet it is certain that if Mrs. Thornton, when he first knew her, had been as plain and sombre in appearance as he now would have had her, he never would have sought to win her for himself.

After a few words, she struck the piano and sang again. Her listener changed his position so that the light now fell upon him. After all, *was* he a man of whom any husband could have cause to be jealous? Why could not the Rev. Harold Thornton have asked himself that question? He was much younger than himself, this supposed invader of his domestic peace; perhaps about four-and-twenty, slight, tall, and with the tone and manner of one well born and gently nurtured. Nothing striking in the face, features that it would be difficult to

describe—impossible to remember. Fair hair and moustache, a colourless complexion, a look of kindly good-temper—if the face had any one predominant expression it was that of indecision and weakness. A man altogether whom you would be more inclined to like than to rely upon. But he certainly did not look one prone to evil himself, or likely to lead others into it. Mrs. Thornton's eyes were very large and dark, and she *would* say a great many things with them that perhaps she did not quite mean, but still, what husband in his senses need have distressed himself very much, let her eyes rest as long as they would on Mr. Audley Dale?

Perhaps the miserable man outside was not in his senses—crazed and distraught with his own unhappy fancies; but there he stood, out in the rain and darkness, peering at those two by the instrument with eyes that, if they had had the power, would have blasted them.

Luckily for them they had not. Luckily perhaps for the unseen looker-on some faint sense of personal discomfort made itself felt through all his mental disquiet. If he had stayed there much longer he would have been wet through; as it was, he felt chilled to the bone, damp and wretched. He would do what he had better have done before he peered in at the window, go in at once and seek shelter.

A servant let him in who was, to all appearance, the very quintessence of what a well-trained domestic should be. Neat in her dress, with smooth hair, not a bit of finery about her, and yet looking as if well paid. A servant who would have done credit to a much more pretentious establishment than that of the Rectory. Tall, slight, and of a good figure, which her dress fitted to perfection; perhaps about twenty-five, with a face that had no impertinent pretensions to prettiness, and yet had nothing about it disagreeable for the

eye to rest on. If it had not been for her dress, and her manner, and her figure, you would have called that pale, small-featured face, where there were yet a few traces of the small-pox, plain ; as it was, it seemed to complete the *tout ensemble* and make up the *beau ideal* of a first class waiting-maid.

She looked sympathisingly at her master as she let him in. Not impertinently so—her looks conveyed just as much concern as a well-bred domestic would feel entitled to display when she remarked upon her master's having been caught in the rain, and brought him his slippers.

“Such a very wet night, sir, for you to be out in. Mr. Dale is in the drawing-room,” she added : and how she did it, it is impossible to say, but the tone in which she uttered the last observation conveyed a shade more sympathy than that in which she spoke of the rain. It was impossible for her master to feel affronted by her impertinence, and yet that paragon of waiting-

women, Charlotte Clare, had done an exceedingly impertinent thing—told her master of a guest in his drawing-room, and conveyed to him her regret and pity that he should be there.

If the Rev. Harold Thornton was disposed to play the part of Othello, here was an Iago in petticoats ready to urge him on.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT MRS. THORNTON SAW FROM HER BED-ROOM WINDOW.

THE master of the house went into his drawing-room, and his guest came forward with extended hand. What was the other to do? He hated this man with all his soul; he believed that he contemplated the destruction of his peace and of his honour, and yet, as things were, there was nothing for him but to take his hand, and exchange the usual commonplaces of greeting. They were stiffly done on his part, and not too easily uttered by Mr. Dale. He was never at home in the Rec-

tory when the Rector was there. It was not that he had the slightest idea of the disquietude which he occasioned him. Mr. Dale was very free from self-conceit, and it had never yet occurred to him that he found such favour in Mrs. Thornton's eyes as to trouble her husband. He liked her very much, she was good-natured and amusing, and clever enough to make him believe in her as far handsomer, more refined, an altogether higher being than she really was. Mr. Thornton had had the same belief in his time. He had gone from one extreme to the other, and was *desillusionné*, and a great deal more. His wife was certainly neither the angel nor the paragon he had thought her, but she was quite as far from being the traitress he imagined her capable of becoming.

There was an awkward interval which Mrs. Thornton did her best to cover. It was a wet night, and she was sorry for it; why had Mr. Thornton gone out in the

rain ? He might have told her it was because even the rain was more endurable than he had found his home, but things had not yet got to such a pass that he could say this before Mr. Dale, and therefore he sat silent in his usual chair, answering absently, and with a sullen reserve that was almost rudeness, the few remarks Mr. Dale made to him. At last the other rose to go, it was so clear that he was unwelcome, and then husband and wife found themselves alone.

Mrs. Thornton glanced at her lord. "He's in a sweet temper," she said to herself, and then went on humming the air of the song she had last been singing. Considering that they had so recently had a quarrel, her attitude and manner were enough to exasperate a sweeter tempered man than the Rev. Harold Thornton. Both were expressive of the most complete defiance of himself, the most utter unconcern as to whether or not he was affected by

their recent disagreement ; he could not help understanding them as such, and the understanding did not tend to soften the tone in which he spoke.

“ I think I told you I would not have that man in the house.”

“ Why did n't you tell *him* so ? would n't that have been better than leaving me to do it—or have left word with Clare to that effect ?—she might have given him your message—I don't see that it would have been quite consistent with politeness for me to do it.”

“ At least you need not have made him so welcome as you did—let him lean over your chair, turn your page, look in your eyes and have you look back in his.”

“ If that was so,” she said, “ he had the best of it. His eyes are not worth looking at. Now, nobody can say but what mine are.”

“ Woman !” he cried passionately, as he paced the room to and fro, “ do you only meet me with a jest or a lie ?”

“At any rate, I meet you with more courtesy than you do me,” she said, in a tone which had the slightest flavour of the style called theatrical in it. If any one conversant with the world behind the stage had been there, he might have thought that, notwithstanding the immaculate respectability of her present position, Mrs. Harold Thornton was not altogether a stranger to that world. Then she changed her tone into one which had more the savour of every-day life, and continued. “It’s perfectly absurd, Harold, going on like this. How can you make such a fool of yourself? You haven’t the slightest reason to make yourself so miserable as you do, and what on earth are you doing it for? I like to be admired; Mr. Audley Dale likes to admire me, and, whatever you may say, we are both perfectly justified in the feeling. I shall *not* affront him; I shall *not* tell him to stop away from the house; I shall be civil to him when he comes, and sing to

him as much as he pleases. If you like to make yourself the laughing-stock of the town by letting him see what degrading suspicions you have formed, do so. *I* can't help it, only do n't expect me to have act or part in the matter. Now, if you are sufficiently cooled down, shall I ring and have the servants in to prayers?"

He was in a very suitable frame of mind for it! but what could he do,—as she rang the bell, and Clare came gliding in with her usual step, as soft and lissome as a cat's, followed by Deb, looking red and sleepy from her doze by the kitchen fire,—but take the book and go through the usual forms mechanically. Clare knelt down at a respectful distance; she was always well behaved, but in prayer-time propriety itself. Deb, when the reading had been unusually long, and after a hard day's washing, had been known to fall asleep and utter an audible snore, but Clare was always wide awake on such occasions, her eyelids just

modestly drooped, her whole manner expressive of a subdued propriety that it was charming to witness ; she never yawned, never showed the slightest symptom of weariness, never rose half a second too soon ; always left the room with a staid, reverent manner as if benefited and refreshed by what she had heard, with a low good-night to both master and mistress, which was in itself as nearly a benediction as a servant so respectful as Charlotte Clare would venture to utter to her superiors.

The prayers were read to-night as usual, but Mr. Thornton's voice almost betrayed the emotion that was surging within him. They were long prayers—if I may say so, tedious, and the reading was generally from the Old Testament or the more abstruse portion of one of the Epistles. Mrs. Thornton half sat, half knelt, as gracefully as ever. Her attitudes were always good, if a little too studied ; and perhaps she paid as much attention as usual to-night to the devotional

forms her husband was going through, but that certainly is not saying very much, and she rose as soon as they were over, and proceeded to her bedroom, followed by Clare, who sometimes undertook a lady's maid's duties.

"I don't want you to-night," her mistress said sharply, and then, closing the door, drew up the blind of her bedroom window and sat down by it. "How I hate that woman!" she said. "I wonder whether it is because there's nothing about her I can find fault with. She's as perfect as a servant can very well be, and perfection in anything is simply detestable."

She looked out of her window vacantly and wearily. There was no likelihood of Mr. Thornton's interrupting her. He had gone, as he generally did after one of their disagreements, to his study, and would most likely stay there for hours, "working the bile off," as his wife irreverently said. But she was in no humour for sleep herself.

She was more troubled than she had chosen to let him see, by their late quarrel. She did not care for him very much ; but she liked peace and quietness. Perhaps, if she had liked him just a little more, a quarrel with him would have had more zest and interest ; as it was, it only bored and wearied her. They must go on together, and why could n't they do it peaceably ?

The look-out from her bed-room window was almost typical of her life, in its dull, grey sameness. Beyond the Rectory garden, where nothing grew but a few stunted trees and cabbages, lay a field, or what had once been one. The boys of the parish played here ; and their feet had pretty well worn away what verdure there had ever been. Carpets were beaten by those few in St. Hilda who had them to beat, and a donkey or two made a point of browsing and getting what poor nutriment they might from the unfruitful ground. Then came two or three hovels which by no license of the pen or

tongue could one dignify as cottages ; then the long, bare denes, with their monotonous expanse of sand, and then the sea—to-night in its still calmness, as tame and dull as the denes themselves. There was nothing lovely, nothing attractive, in the picture on which her eyes rested. The rain had left off, and the moon shone on it with a dull, watery light ; as if even that was chary of the beauty which it gives so often to the waves. But the lack of beauty struck less painfully upon the weary woman looking on it than did the dull, heavy sameness—the want of stir or life. If there had been a tempest, and the ocean raging, she would have liked it better. There would have been something to thrill her pulses, to excite her brain, to stir the blood that moved so slowly in her. As it was, all seemed as languid and as dull as the long, uneventful days that one after another dragged their slow length along.

She drew away from the window, pre-

sently, and went to the glass, slowly unwinding her long, black hair before it. She was very proud of her hair, and with some reason : there was a wonderful quantity of it, and it was very rich and beautiful. She looked handsome enough, in spite of her pallor, standing there before the glass, and she gave a half sigh as she looked on herself.

“What’s the good of it all, with no one to look at me? Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I’d never tried to be respectable. I didn’t think it was so hard, or I don’t believe I should have made the attempt. I’m thirty-two!” Mrs. Thornton was in the seclusion of her chamber, or she would have only owned to twenty-eight. “And I wonder how it will be possible to mete out the three-score years and ten! What a mercy it is we don’t live in the time of the patriarchs!”

As she turned towards the window, she saw that she had not lowered the blind, and went forward to do so. Just as she

was there, a figure moving in the garden caught her eye. She knew the outlines and the stealthy, well-trained step—undeniably graceful, but with a grace that was unpleasant to see. You thought, as you saw it, of a cat—a tamed leopard—a panther with its claws cut—anything but the genial, easy, simple grace of a woman.

“Is that—can that be Clare?” said Mrs. Thornton, eagerly. “Now, what is taking her out? It’s not a night for a moonlight stroll; besides, she ought to be in bed, virtuously tucked up, with the very moon and stars shut out, lest they should peer in on her propriety. There’s somebody in coat and trousers peering over the garden hedge. That paragon of handmaids has got a lover! I wish Harold was here to see her. I should like him to learn that his piece of domestic perfection is just as fallible as any other woman. I expect they’ve something else to talk about than texts, or

‘master’s’ last sermon. . I wonder, now, what affianced ones in that class *do* find to talk about?”

She had an amused smile on her face now; even the interest of her maid-servant’s love affair was something. As the discreet mistress of a household, she ought, of course, to have summoned Clare in, and have reproved her for keeping tryst at such improper hours. But instead of doing so, she put out her candle, so that she might not be observed from below, and continued her watch.

Presently her interest deepened. At first the affair had only had the excitement of a little change in her monotonous life; but now, as the moonlight fell on the figure of the man talking to Clare, it became more personal.

“He’s uncommonly like Audley Dale,” she said to herself, and then began to think how she should ascertain whether it was he or not. Her window was a case-

ment, opening from the middle. It would be more easy to open one half of this without attracting the attention of those below than if it were of the ordinary shape. She unfastened the bolt, and gently pushed one half open ; then leaned forward, and Audley Dale's voice, though in tones so low that she could not catch the purport of the words, caught her ear. She was sure it was he ! And what could he be there for but to make love to the immaculate Clare ? Her attitude was too familiar to admit of any other supposition, and her hand was on his arm, as if it had a right to rest there.

He did not stay long. Clare seemed as if she would have detained him ; but he almost broke from her. There was an impatient farewell, as if he chafed at being hindered, and then a leap over the garden hedge, and he was gone ; and Mrs. Thornton, gently closing her window, watched her maid turn and re-enter the house.

“To think of it!” she said to herself. “Audley Dale! I did give him credit for better taste. The creature’s marked with the small-pox! and really it’s not at all the sort of thing he ought to do.”

Mrs. Thornton looked staid and matronly—almost motherly—as she sat back in her low American chair, thinking matters over.

“I shall give him a talking to to-morrow. I don’t know whether I shall send Clare away or not. No doubt Harold would dismiss the poor sinner as quite unfit for his saintly service; but where should I get a girl to suit me so well? I don’t like her, but she knows her work. But Audley Dale must be brought to see that this sort of thing can’t be allowed. Nothing ruins a young man first starting into life like a low entanglement. Audley ought to be brought to see it. Good gracious! to think of Harold’s fancying he’s in love with me! It would do him a great deal more good

than anything of *this* kind. Form his manners and improve him—which I don't think meeting my housemaid by moonlight will do."

CHAPTER III.

MRS. THORNTON'S ANTECEDENTS.

THE Rev. Harold Thornton had been about six years domiciled in St. Hilda. Before that time he had been a very hard-working curate in one of the poorest and densest parts of London ; fighting his fight manfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil, as exemplified in the flaring gin-palaces, the frowzy, overcrowded lodgings, the narrow, squalid streets, and the sin and the ignorance that rose Hydra-like around him. He had done his best ; he was a good man, although perhaps not a very sweet-tempered one ;

early and late he had toiled and striven, holding his life often in his hand, visiting dens from which even the police would shrink, and tending death-beds, which were enough to try even the iron nerves of the most practised medical men. He was a soldier of the Lord. So unhappily constituted, that in some things he must always fall woefully short of his great Exemplar. But in long-suffering, steadfastness, and unselfishness ready to follow Him to the death.

At last he gave way—broke down in the very prime of life—and found there was nothing for him but compulsory retirement and rest, or an early grave. Some one who knew the man, the good that was in him, and the work that, if spared, he might yet do, offered him the living of St. Hilda. It cost him a struggle to accept it. He was so morbidly conscientious, so fearful of swerving in the least from the hard, self-sacrificing line of duty he had laid down, of,

as he expressed it, drawing his hand from the plough to which he had put it, that even with all the warnings of his medical adviser ringing in his ears, he had some struggles with himself, much anxious consideration, before he could prevail upon himself to do so. Ought he not to stay where he was and die? Was it not his post, and had he any right to leave it? If St. Hilda had been a better living, in a fashionable or very attractive part of the country, he would certainly have answered these questions in the affirmative, and remained at his post till he had perished at it. But as a population was offered to his charge which was almost as poor as the one he was leaving—a dull, unlovely country, with the bleak east wind blowing on it, a small stipend, and an untempting parsonage, Harold Thornton thought himself justified in giving himself a chance for his life, and so settled at St. Hilda.

The keen cold air did wonders for his

exhausted system. The duties, after all, were lighter than in his London parish ; and, if his people were poor, there was not that depressing, squalid hopelessness, that dreary sameness of vice and poverty to contend with, which had weighed him down like an incubus. Wearmouth had twelve parishes besides his own, so that there was no want of clerical society in the neighbourhood ; and, let him eschew all other as he might, he was necessarily drawn into this, so that, even in spite of himself, things were pleasanter, brighter, and more cheerful, in St. Hilda's than he had ever found them at St. Lazarus. He grew better and stronger in spite of himself. He had really cared so little for the matter—his own life had always seemed to him the thing least worth his troubling about. Then worldly matters improved with him. A distant relative from whom he had not had the slightest expectations, left him a couple of hundred a year. For his modest desires,

he was a rich man. Everybody who heard of his legacy said that he would marry now, and soon after he did, though it is very likely, if the lady would only have had him on his smaller income, he would have married just the same upon it. He was not a man to consult prudence in pecuniary matters—just now he did not consult prudence at all, making, in his marriage, the one great mistake of his life.

Wearmouth attracted a few visitors in the season. It was cheap, if neither very lively nor very pretty; and one summer Miss Henrietta Vane came there with her aunt, a widow. The aunt was about to marry again. She had brought her niece with her, partly for company, partly to do something for her while she had still nobody but herself to consult about the doing so. They were both showy women, sure to attract attention wherever they went. Miss Vane attracted a great deal when, there being talk of an amateur concert in

behalf of the funds of the life-boat, she volunteered to assist, and did so in a style that threw every one of her compeers into the shade.

She looked splendid, too, as she sang. The excitement, the applause, gave her beauty a brilliancy and colour which would have been enough, even without the slight *soupçon* of rouge she had felt justified in adding. People—ladies, especially, whose daughters she had outshone—said that she must have been trained for the stage, or, at least, the concert-room. Such cultivation, and such a style, were wholly beyond any one who wished merely to shine in a drawing-room.

Miss Vane, when, amidst all the compliments she received after her performance, some such remarks reached her ears, met them by owning frankly (though untruly) that she had been taught to teach, and gave the name of a well-known operatic singer, from whom she had received sing-

ing lessons. She had pupils in London, and the labour of teaching had been too much lately for her, so her aunt, who was always doing something good-natured for her orphan niece, had brought her here to recruit herself a little.

Mr. Thornton had been at the concert. If "there's a divinity doth shape our ends," his had certainly been shaped for him that night. He disapproved of such places of amusement—even the end, with him, would not justify the means. Why could not people, he urged, give their money to the charity without having their ears tickled, and their senses stimulated? But Mrs. Rushington, the wife of the one wealthy parishioner in St. Hilda, had prevailed upon him to take a ticket, and afterwards make him join her party and go. It was so difficult to say no to Mrs. Rushington—few, very few people indeed, could do that. After the performance, she took him into the temporary green-room with her,

and there he heard Miss Vane's account of herself.

He was interested in her—but that is a cold word. This woman won upon him at once as no woman had ever yet done. Sometimes he had thought of marriage as a possible event in his life, if he could meet with one who promised to be a suitable help-meet in his work, and whenever he had pictured such a partner, it had been an altogether different being to Henrietta Vane.

Passion, fancy—the strange madness men called love—what had he, God's servant, to do with it? It would weaken him for his vocation, turn him from the upward path which he was treading so painfully, and in which it was his never-ending work to lead others. He was most woefully ignorant of himself. Because, till now, his passions and inclinations had been well kept under, or rather, had always gone in the way he wished, he had made the great mistake of believing that he had none. Now

he had to learn that at length they had slipped his leash, and henceforth would run their way, not his.

He was now eight-and-thirty, and no boy of eighteen ever fell more hopelessly, madly in love with a pretty pink and white face than did he with the faded classic beauty of Henrietta Vane. Never in all his life had the faintest shadow of such a feeling crossed him. He did not even see his danger, till it was too late, never felt his cords till he was bound in them hand and foot, never knew that Delilah's hand had touched his locks till she had shorn his strength away.

It was so patent, the impression she had made, that not only Miss Vane, who was quick-sighted enough in such matters, but her aunt and Mrs. Rushington—certainly both of them ladies who were quick-sighted too—saw it. When Mrs. Ridge had her niece safely home, and they were sitting over their snug little supper, each with her

modest little potion of hot brandy and water by her, the aunt remarked—

“I think you’ve made a conquest to-night ; and I am sure I hope so. At your age—between ourselves, you know, you were thirty last birthday—it’s time you settled.”

“You need n’t remind me of that, aunt. What on earth does it matter how old a woman is, so long as her looks do n’t betray her ?”

“But your looks do betray you. When you do n’t rouge, and nobody can do that with safety by day-light, you look even older than you are. That was one reason I brought you down here—you are going off so terribly. I thought a quiet little out-of-the-world place like this would be just the thing for both of us, and give us the rest of which we’re alike in need, but you especially. But it’ll be a very great bit of good luck if you make a hit like this into the bargain.”

“You’re uncommonly plain-spoken, aunt. I wish you’d remember that it may not be altogether agreeable.”

“It’s no good being cross, Hetty. You *have* gone off, that’s all about it. You’ve gone the pace a little too fast. You nervous, excitable people always do. Whatever would have become of me, with all my troubles, and the life I’ve led, if I hadn’t taken things easily? Just tell me that.”

“Nobody would credit you, certainly, with undue excess of feeling,” said Henrietta, making pellets of her bread, and eating them viciously.

“Well, they would n’t, and a very good thing for me too.—Have a little gravy. I never knew a woman cook a sweetbread better than our present landlady.” And, her niece declining the proffered gravy with an imperious gesture, Mrs. Ridge took the residue herself.

She was evidently enjoying her supper,

whatever her niece might do. A comfortable-looking woman always, she overflowed with her intense appreciation of the good things of this life whenever that meal came round. For many years it had been the one bright spot in the four-and-twenty hours—the pleasant little oasis which, in the daily round of her hard-working existence, she had had to look forward to. She was handsome still, and quite right in saying, that she wore better than her niece. At this period she was at least fifty, and might have dropped eight years. She was round, rosy, large and genial, good-tempered, and, if a little coarse, good-natured and well-meaning enough in her way. She meant kindly now by her niece, even when she was saying the most unpleasant things; and, as she sipped her brandy and water, and poured a little out of the decanter to strengthen the dose with, she continued—

“You know, Hetty, you can’t go on like this. You’ll never do for a concert singer;

your lungs won't stand the strain, and if you could, law! what a life it is! I've stood it, because I always would take things easy, and never let trifles trouble me; but you're not that sort, and as to teaching, why, I think sweeping a crossing would be a pleasant change to it. No, my advice is this—and if you've a grain of sense you'll take it—just lead that parson on. I've heard a little about him; the living is n't much, but he has private property. If I know anything about men, he'll be on the sands to-morrow morning, and he won't be thinking of his sermon either. You go too—bathe first—the tide will be in early, and that'll give you an excuse for having your hair about your shoulders—there ain't such another head of hair I reckon in this place. I'll be there too, and if he's a grain of sense he'll come and thank you for your song last night. We'll go to his church next Sunday—I wonder if there ain't any old brasses, or things of that sort, we could ask him to

show us afterwards—if there's nothing else, there's safe to be a painted window in memorial of somebody or other that I dare-say never did a thing in their lives worth remembering them for. Never mind, the window 'll do to talk about. Law ! what a comfort it will be to see you safe and respectable. You're not the sort to stand knocking about in the world."

" And do you think I'm the sort for the eminently respectable life you wish me to lead ?" said Henrietta, bitterly. " Are my antecedents quite such as to fit me for being the mistress of a rectory, and the wife of a parish clergyman ?"

" Why, of course they are," said her aunt, sopping up the last drop of gravy with her bread. " A little cheese, Hetty—I like it out of the middle with some of the blue mould on it. Law ! what would life be without suppers ? What are your antecedents ?—Your papa was a solicitor ; nobody can say anything against him, but

that perhaps he spent a little more money than he ought. Never mind, it was his own if he did. With regard to your mamma, why, poor dear, she was his wife, and nobody can say she was n't. As to her having been on the stage first, what business is that of any one's? any more than it is that I kept on the stage after I was married, and had to keep my husband because he would n't keep me, and so your papa cut me, and made poor dear Polly do so too. All that anybody that marries you need know about me is that my late husband was a doctor—I should n't even say he kept a shop and sold seidlitz powders and patent medicines. There's no occasion to let any one know that Mrs. Ridge was Miss Josselyn, and took the waiting-maids' parts till she got too stout, and had to do the heavy mothers. I'm Mrs. Ridge, a medical man's relict, and I'll defy anybody to say anything else. As to you, your papa did n't die very well off, and you've had to give music lessons—

you've had some thoughts of going out governessing—I'd say that, it sounds interesting, a parson's sure to like it, their girls so often have to go out—they know what the life is. This Mr. Thorn—isn't that it—will be sure to want to save you from it—the idea of your having to encounter it will make you all the more charming in his eyes ; he'll pity you, and we know very well what pity's own cousin to. There's no occasion to tell him you've ever been before the footlights or behind the scenes, and would have made a very fair actress, especially in tragic parts, if only you'd had the stamina to stand the life, and the lungs to fill the house."

" Well, and your intended, and the entertainment in America."

" Who's going to tell him anything about that ? I sha'n't. I'm going to marry again—I've been ten years a widow, living on my means—said means arising from making myself generally useful at almost every one of

the London theatres. Mr. Harrup is a gentleman of property—so he says, and if he does n't know, who does? but his affairs require his presence in the United States. I'm going with him to spend my honeymoon there. I'm not bound to say that Mr. Harrup proposes to give an entertainment, ventriloquial and otherwise, and that I, being a good pianoforte player, am going to assist him. If anybody on this side the water hears what we are doing on the other, how will they know we're the same parties? I shan't tell 'em. Bless you, once you're married, your husband will think precious little of your aunt. The best way to keep him from doing so will be to tell him my income's derived from an annuity that dies with me, and Mr. Harrup has a large family of orphan nieces and nephews entirely dependent on him, and whom he promised his beloved only sister on her deathbed to look to. Mr. Thornton won't trouble himself much about me, once

he's heard that. I do n't want to disgrace you ; of course, when you're a parson's wife it won't do for you to have an uncle and aunt who ain't so very much better than genteel strolling players—and, being poor Polly's only child, I should like to do what is right by you—see you comfortably married, thoroughly set up amongst the respectables, and then say good bye to you for ever. If you like to drop me a line now and then you may ; if I write back, you need n't be afraid of showing your husband the letters—I shall know what I'm about when I send them—but if you do n't write at all, I sha'n't fret. I'm not one to go on about heartlessness or ingratitude—stuff ! if people expect to be paid for any good turn they do, why do n't they say so ? I shall take it, that you've gone your way, and I've gone mine, and we're the best of friends, only it's not convenient to see too much of one another."

"I do n't think I shall like the life," said Henrietta, doubtfully.

“ Well, it’ll be slow, I dare say, at first, but law! you’ll soon get into it. It’ll be *safe*,” said Mrs. Ridge, emphatically, “ and with a woman like you, Henrietta, that means a great deal. You’ll have to give the old women flannel petticoats, and hear their grumblings. I don’t see that you need teach in the schools—put that on the girls, there’s always lots in every parish. You must sing sacred music on a Sunday, and perhaps eat cold dinners—but you’ll get on all right after a bit, there’s no fear.”

“ And suppose after all your good advice, aunt, there’s no occasion for me to take it. Suppose Mr. Thornton never gives me the chance of showing what sort of a rector’s wife I should make ?” said Henrietta.

“ Don’t you be a fool, Hetty Vane,” replied her relative, sharply. “ Or, what’s worse, pretend to be one. That man’s *hooked*. If ever I saw a fish caught, I’ve seen one to-night. Now go to bed, or you’ll be fit for nothing to-morrow. You’ll

feel worse, as it is, for what you've been doing to-night. Never mind, I think you've done the best piece of work you've done for yourself for one while."

Mrs. Rushington, whose eyes, as I have said, were as clear as Mrs. Ridge's, expressed much the same thing to her husband, as she sat in the privacy of their bed-chamber brushing out her thick black hair.

"John," she said, "I think Mr. Thornton is taken with the lady who sang to-night—Miss Vane."

"A very good thing, too," said Mr. Rushington. "A clergyman ought to be married."

"That depends upon the kind of wife he gets," said Mrs. Rushington. "In this case I think he would be better without one."

"I don't see why she shouldn't do as well as any other. Didn't she say something about giving lessons in town? I wonder if she'd give them here. Don't you think you could sound her about Milly?"

“Thank you, I don’t care to try—Milly will do very well without lessons from Miss Vane,” said Milly’s mother. “She is not at all the sort of person I should like to see about my daughter.”

Then she said nothing more to her husband, but as she twisted her hair up for the night round her handsome head, thought to herself, “If Mr. Thornton doesn’t mind, he’ll make a fool of himself, as sure as my name’s Margaret.”

CHAPTER IV.

A MISPLACED WOMAN.

EVENTS proved that both Mrs. Rushington and Mrs. Ridge were right. Before a fortnight had elapsed, Mr. Thornton had proposed to Miss Vane, and been accepted. She did not altogether like him, and perhaps as much as such a woman could be afraid of any man she was afraid of him. Some instinct told her that under all the fervid passion for herself, under all the intense religiousness and self-abnegation of which so many spoke admiringly, there yet lurked something dangerous. Something of which the man himself was not aware—

latent fire, which might some day burn to evil purpose—a touch of the wild beast nature, which might wake when least suspected.

Then she put such thoughts from her, and asked herself what could she do but take him? What better thing did life hold out to her? Her youth was gone, and, handsome as she was, she was not wearing well. She had already as many grey hairs as her aunt, and there were twenty years between them. A little longer, and how the lines by her temples and under her eyes would deepen and lengthen, and no dressmaker be able to hide that she was growing thin and angular.

Giving music lessons was a great drudgery, and she had not been taught to teach, her training having adapted her rather for display. She would have liked the stage or the concert-room infinitely better than the tame career offered her,

but, as her aunt said, and as she knew, she could not stand the life. The foul air, the late hours, the excitement—even the continuous strain necessary to fill a large area with the voice either in singing or speaking—were too much for her ; she had essayed it, and broken down. That had been a terrible disappointment to her, for she would have so dearly liked the life—the triumphs, the applause, the display, the comrades with whom she would have worked, even the erratic, uncertain nature of the employment, would all have been so infinitely better than the safe, comfortable security offered her in the Rectory of St. Hilda.

However, as she said to herself, “I cannot have just what I want, so I must take what I can get, and make the best of it.” And the best of it she meant to make ; she was not at all a bad woman ; she would have told you that, like Becky Sharp, she only wanted opportunities for

being a very good one. But she was a much better person than Becky—this poor used-up, handsome Hetty Vane. She meant to do her duty with the old women's flannel petticoats, and the Sunday schools too. She would be good and proper, and try very hard to forget all that she had seen and heard in her brief theatrical career as Miss Howard.

There was a little society at Wearmouth—plenty of clergymen and their wives, and society too of a different kind, for it was a garrison town—and whatever there was she would make the best of it. The Rectory was dull, its master's income not very large, but she was a good manager, and had learned enough economy from her aunt to know how to make money go as far as most women, and by-and-bye things might improve.

Mr. Thornton was clever, every one who heard him in the pulpit said so ; even she herself had felt a momentary thrill when

she heard his first sermon, and Mrs. Ridge had wiped her eyes and given twice what she had intended to the collection that followed. Why should he waste his talents much longer in this little nook of the world? She would get him to write as well as to preach; draw men's eyes to him if he could not their ears; make himself known and talked about. And then there were such splendid openings in the Church! He might get a fashionable London living, and, from that, a chaplaincy to the Queen, a deanery; by-and-bye it might even be a bishopric; for as she said to herself, "It is not often, but still, once in a way, we do find a bishop that's been made so for his brains." She had quite sufficient intellect to appreciate Mr. Thornton's, and, she flattered herself, sufficient tact and influence over him, to induce him to consider his talents a marketable commodity. She had had a good many flirtations in her time, more or less tender, but she had

never been in love in her life. It is not at all in accordance with the general belief, but there really are some women who can get on without the tender passion altogether, and Henrietta Vane was one of them.

There was a very short courtship, for Mrs. Ridge's own wedding-day was drawing near, and she wished to see her niece safely disposed of before she re-entered matrimony herself. There was no reason at all that the courtship should be a long one, but quite the reverse; as Mrs. Ridge frankly told the Rector, "You can't go and see Hetty when she's in lodgings by herself in London. Besides, you'll have your parish to attend to."

Mr. Thornton was very glad that there should be no delay. Hetty told her aunt that, as it was to be, the sooner it was over the better; and the marriage took place. It was a very quiet one. Mr. Harrup came down and gave the bride away. He had been well drilled by his own intended for the

occasion, and really looked and acted the part of a benevolent gentlemanly *père de famille*, very well. There were no bridesmaids: Mrs. Ridge said frankly that Hetty had but few friends, and some of those would find the expense of a journey to Wearmouth more than they would like. "It's best to begin as you mean to go on," she said to her niece, "and drop every one at once. You can't keep up with your old set, you know, so now is the time to give them the cut direct."

Mr. Thornton liked the quietness of his wedding beyond everything. Nothing would have horrified him more than a fashionable one, with its bridesmaids and bouquets, its display and speech-making. He carried off his wife to Paris—it had been the dream of her life to go there—it was the paradise of women, she had always believed,—it had been the wish of his heart to visit it, for years. He had carried on a correspondence with a leading minister of

the French Protestant Church, and there were some matters he had long felt could only be discussed with any satisfaction personally. This visit would give him the opportunity he wanted, and which before he had never felt justified in making. Altogether the honeymoon passed off very well. Mrs. Thornton received a very affectionate farewell letter from her aunt, whose marriage took place just a week after that of her niece; she read bits of it to her husband, but did not offer to show it to him. As she said to herself, it was best to begin as people meant to go on, and notwithstanding Aunt Harriet's promise of discretion in her letter-writing, it was more than likely that some day or other she would forget it in one of her epistles; and she wished to keep up a correspondence with her aunt, for whom, after all, she cared a very great deal more than she did for her husband. They came back to Wearmouth at the end of three weeks,—Mr.

Thornton could not prevail upon himself to stay longer away from his congregation. He had had the one holiday of his life—tasted for once what that vain transitory thing earthly happiness is. A happiness entirely mundane—without any self-sacrifice, any hard unlovely duty in it—a happiness that depended sheerly upon blue skies, a pleasant climate, change of scene, and the constant presence of the woman he loved. It was a delicious time; and though he had two or three interviews with M. Bonneville, the pasteur whom he had so wished to see, those interviews added very little to the delight of that time. He used afterwards, in the days when he was steeped to the lips in misery, and seemed degraded in his own eyes, and, to his distorted fancy, in those of other men, to look upon this as a period of sin and folly, which deserved the retribution that followed on it. But at any rate he was happy now—just as happy, as he afterwards told himself, as if he had

not a soul to be saved, or as if there was nothing in the world worth caring for, but the light of a woman's eye, and the smile of a woman's lip.

His wife wished him to be happy: she meant to make him so. She was pleasant to live with on the whole, and if quick tempered, still *good* tempered,—that is to say, she did not take offence at trifles, liked her own way, but still was ready to concede that her husband might like his, was very ready to study his peculiarities, and give them a fair share of humouring. She was very happy, too, these three weeks; there was too much to see for her husband and herself to see much of one another, and she came back to Wearmouth thinking that, after all, a life in the walls of a rectory might be more endurable than she had imagined.

“Of course he will have the place done up for me,” she said to her aunt, and Mrs. Ridge had replied,

“I suppose so, but he may not think about it, he’s not that sort of man ; if he doesn’t, get him to put it in hand when you come back, and look after the tradesmen’s bills yourself ; Mr. Thornton’s just the kind of man to be cheated right and left by any one who drives in a nail or whitewashes a ceiling for him.”

But Mr. Thornton had thought about renovating the Rectory ; he was aware that the furniture was old, for he had taken it of the widow of his predecessor, and the rooms wanted re-papering, for they were faded and dull ; but, as he told his wife, he could not afford to do it at present. His schools cost him a great deal of money. Nearly the whole expense fell upon Mr. Rushington and himself, and their Paris trip had cost him more than he had anticipated.

Mrs. Thornton thought it rather hard she should have to go without a drawing-room carpet because the infant school wanted a new floor, but Mr. Thornton had

behaved very well while they were at Paris, and made her some very handsome presents—(how he blamed himself afterwards for pandering to her vanity and sinful love of display, as he expressed it)—and she was not unreasonable, and so made up her mind to wait for a time.

Then she made acquaintance with Wearmouth society in the persons of the eleven other rectors and vicars and their eight wives—of the three who had none, two were widowers and one a bachelor—and Mrs. Rushington called formally, with her daughter Milly. The two ladies did not take to each other very cordially at first, but made up their minds to be on friendly terms notwithstanding, each being quite aware of what was due to the other; and then Mrs. Thornton tried, poor woman, to do her duty, as the Catechism she heard the Sunday-school repeat, phrased it “in the station to which God had called her,” and found the doing so much harder and more

uncongenial work than she had ever imagined it would be.

If only she and her husband had understood each other! They might have done without love, if either had had a little comprehension of the other's nature. Hers craved passionately for excitement—in any and every form—dress, display, society; his found enough in the routine of his daily life, behind which lay that unseen world, with its terrors and its hopes, to which he and all others were wending. There was an intensity of passion in him, far more than in her, and it found two outlets—his religion and his love. He was happy in neither, forever dissatisfied with himself, forever falling short of his ideal of what a Christian man should be, and in his love continually seeking for more than it would give, asking something back for all that he had lavished, and asking, tormenting himself in vain. He wearied his wife, he bored her, and his intense religiousness wearied and bored her

too. She was not a pious woman—she was quite willing to go to church twice on a Sunday, and have family prayers. She went visiting the old women, and assisted in the Sunday-school. But there was an end. She was not a bad woman, and she really tried very hard to do her best as well as she knew how ; but she was creedless, and, for all practical purposes, godless, and one who was quite content to trouble herself very little about the life to come, if only she could have got a few more good things in the life that she now had.

But the great need of her nature being excitement, she found it for herself, and that not after a very proper fashion. As I have said, the barracks were just on the outskirts of Wearmouth, and where there are barracks, officers follow as a matter of course. They all visited at the Rushingtons', and of course Mrs. Thornton visited there too, so that it befell that she became acquainted with Mr. Audley Dale, and the

consequence of such acquaintanceship was the state of things which I have depicted in the opening chapter. .

Mrs. Thornton did n't mean any harm—she wished to amuse herself. Mr. Audley Dale did n't mean any harm—he wished to be amused. But Mr. Thornton, to whom the idea of amusement as a necessary of life had never presented itself, could not enter into the feelings of either of the parties. He was a miserable man—of all men the most miserable—deceived, injured, and, it might be, on the high road to dishonour. These two were playing at a game that was death to him; but he was a dangerous man to be played with in such sort, if only grace could be given to these misguided creatures to open their eyes and see it.

CHAPTER V.

A WELL-BEHAVED YOUNG PERSON.

MRS. THORNTON sat before her looking-glass with that immaculate damsel, Charlotte Clare, brushing out her tresses. Clare was very handy about her mistress's toilet, and Mrs. Thornton liked having as near an approach to a lady's maid as her circumstances permitted. It was a fine bright morning, and Mrs. Thornton contemplated going out, but before she went she had something to say to Clare which had better be said at once.

The morning light fell strong on that young person's face, as she stood, the very

picture of neatness and dutiful propriety, brushing out the long thick tresses. Mrs. Thornton looked at the reflection of her face in the glass, and it certainly, notwithstanding its air of propriety and decorum, contrasted strongly, in the small meagre features, the dull skin, and poor lustreless hair, with her own magnificent outlines. "What an ugly creature!" she thought to herself; then aloud, "Why did n't they tie your hands, Clare, when you had the small-pox? How ever could they let you make such a fright of yourself?"

Clare made no answer, she did not even pull her mistress's hair tighter, which a great many waiting-maids would have done under the circumstances, but she coloured a faint dull red, and her thin pale lips were tightly set together, and in the greenish-grey eyes a light stole that if any one had been watching, who was versed in animal nature, he would have thought of a cat about to extend her claws to some purpose.

Mrs. Thornton saw the colour and the gleam in the eyes, but she understood them just as little as she did her husband, and went rashly on :

“ That reminds me of something I have to tell you, Clare. I wonder how a young woman of your age and appearance could have acted in the imprudent way you did yesterday evening. I won't say more than that I sat at my bedroom window a little time after I came up-stairs last night. I must beg that what I saw then may never be repeated. Gentlemen will do foolish things, but you must know that even if you were positively attractive, no one in Mr. Dale's position could think of any one in yours, but as a plaything for a little idle time, if for nothing worse. But as it is, it really makes the whole thing so totally inexcusable on your part. I *do* wonder at his forgetting himself ! it's past understanding. However, I trust that you will be more prudent for the future. I shall not acquaint

your master with what I saw last night. He would be sure to insist on your instant dismissal if I did, and I really don't like to send you into the world without a scrap of character, however foolish you may have been."

Clare's dull red colour, which had almost rivalled that of a brickbat, had faded now, and her cheeks, in their greenish, sickly pallor, faintly imitated the tints of her eyes. But she went on braiding and twisting the wonderful coils of hair as deftly as ever, and her mistress sat happily unconscious of the storm she had raised within her handmaid. If the one woman could have killed the other as by a lightning stroke, she would have done it; if all those sheeny satiny tresses which she was twisting and braiding in her supple fingers could have been turned into as many serpents that would have hissed and stung and slain, Clare would have turned them; and yet she stood there, brushing and braiding as if

nothing else were in her thoughts, and to her mistress's long exordium said meekly, "Thank you, ma'am."

"She ought to be much obliged to me," thought Mrs. Thornton. "I think she is—most mistresses would have sent her adrift, but then where should I get anybody to do my hair so well, or wait as she does at table? But what ever could Audley Dale see in such a creature?"

She finished her toilet, and looked very handsome in her little hat and pretty costume. The latter was rather of the shortest, but Mrs. Thornton's feet were worth showing. Then she went out, as she always did at this hour, leaving Clare to clear up her room and proceed with her usual duties.

That exemplary young person was not in just the frame of mind to perform them. She stood just as her mistress had left her, still, humble, meek, and proper, the very *beau ideal* of a well-trained domestic, till

she had heard the outer door close, and then she drew a great breath as if to relieve her overloaded chest, and shaking her clenched hand in the direction which she supposed Mrs. Thornton to have taken, said fiercely,

“Curse her! What does she mean by it? Twitting me with the marks on my face, and looking the while at her own smooth cheeks. Shouldn’t I like to sear them with an iron! She talk like that!—she! older than me by ten years, I’d swear—why, while she was speaking and looking at her face as if there was n’t another like it in the world, I could have pulled out half a handful of grey hairs. Only they’re plaited in and hidden—she would n’t for her life show one—not the only things she’s got to hide, I reckon—not the only things I’d bring to light if I could.” And Clare, Mrs. Thornton’s pattern maid, walked up and down the room chafing with the passion within her, her eyes gleaming more than ever with a

light that, if her mistress had but seen it, must have scared even her careless soul. Greener and fiercer and more venomous grew her eyes—the wild beast in the woman had woke, and was ready to seize and tear anything that came in her way. The flimsy draperies that had been thrown off would have had but a poor chance of remaining whole, had not Clare even in all her passion remembered that if she rent she should have to mend. She shook the dress before she hung it in the wardrobe. “If it was only her, if it was only her,” she cried, while she did so, and then, her passion subsiding, the savageness of the feline animal that had woke within her passing away, she became once more her well-trained, supple, active self, moving about the room as deftly and as gently as if she lived for nothing else than to show with what admirable precision a waiting-maid’s duties could be performed.

Charlotte Clare had a little history of

her own. Nothing very striking about it, but still, such as it is, it may as well be repeated here. When she was fourteen she had nearly died of the disease whose traces she still bore. However, Clare recovered, although, to have looked at the cottage in which she had lived her short life, and the room where she lay stricken down by illness, it would have seemed as if recovery were impossible. Out of this squalid home the mother and two sons were carried—stricken by the same disease which had failed to conquer the gaunt, tall girl who was now quite orphaned, her father having died a year before. Clare had been a good girl, a model girl, in the Sunday-school, and her almost faultless demeanour had attracted the attention of the maiden sister of the Rector of the village. She took the girl into her service, made half domestic, half *protégée* of her. Clare was intelligent, handy at her needle, and her invariably proper behaviour soon

won upon Miss Dale, who believed in Clare as the very model of damsels in her station. She was a good woman, but she had not much common sense, or else she might have known that out of such a home as Charlotte Clare had grown almost to womanhood in, it would have been as great a miracle as any in the Gospels for a good, pure girl to come. It was a standing wonder to the medical man who had attended Clare that she had conquered the small-pox—"she *ought* to have died of it," he said to a professional colleague; it was setting all sanitary rules at defiance for her to have recovered as she had done; but it would have been setting every rule of ethics at defiance if out of that narrow, sordid home, where there was not even space for the commonest requirements of decency, such a girl had stepped as Miss Dale supposed Charlotte Clare to be. She was a clever girl, or perhaps I had better say a cunning one. Good manners and

civil words went a long way with gentlefolks, and so Clare used them. They covered many deficiencies, just as the white-washed front of the cottage where she had lived made people oblivious that all its sleeping accommodation for father, mother, sons, and daughter, consisted of one room, twelve feet by ten. So Clare was civil, and something more—the best bred young person for her station, Miss Dale emphatically declared, that she had ever met with. She must have been born lacquered, her good manners must have been natural to her like a cat's sleekness or its velvet tread; and a few years' service with Miss Dale gave the finishing touches to the exquisite polish.

The Rector had a large family. As was only natural, the children were very frequent visitors at their aunt's. Clare was most attentive to the young ladies, and quite as much so as there was any occasion to be to their brothers. Clare had learned a great deal that was not in the Catechism, or in

the very good little books which Miss Dale provided her with for Sunday reading. That lady did not approve of fiction for her servants, unless it was fiction well-seasoned, to prevent its dangerous effects. Clare took with reverent thankfulness the books her mistress lent her, and helped herself to some reading which she did not lend. There was Pamela in the old bookcase. Clare perused, and, we may hope, profited by it. Also she took in sundry penny periodicals, which, as they are written especially for young ladies of Clare's class, delight in painting virtue rewarded, not, as in Pamela's case, with a mere country squire, but with a coronet, and thousands *ad libitum*. But Clare had some sense. She took all this *cum grano salis*. She did n't expect quite to be my lady; but why she should not be a lady she could not see. She was not handsome — Clare owned that — and the small-pox had been a terrible infliction; but she had a good figure, and in every

way knew how to make the best of herself. Audley Dale was always about the house, when at home for his holidays. Clare was always in his way. He was a public-school boy, destined for the army—a man of the world in his own conceit—and Clare only a country girl, whom his aunt had taken into her service out of charity—an ugly girl, too. Clare once overheard him call her that, and she vowed a vow, after her own fashion, that she would make him think differently. Audley Dale could never tell how it was done, but done it was—this girl, not yet a woman, plain in his eyes, even to repulsiveness—not even a lady—without the graces and the accomplishments that he had been used to in the women of his own class, poor, lowly-born, and scarred for life by disease, yet wound herself around him, drew him on and on, till, he knew not how, he felt something for her that if it was not love, was as fatally akin to it as the fascination which a snake exercises

over its victim, is to the fond eagerness of a self-forgetting passion. Love her! Could any man do that? Was it not rather hate with which this still, pale girl, with the tigress nature dormant in her, and all the tigress suppleness in her gliding movements, and the untaught grace which seemed part of her nature, inspired him? He could not tell, but she drew him on and on till he was, in his own eyes, and what was worse, in his own handwriting, irretrievably committed.

He had his commission, and joined his regiment. Bound to Clare, as she weepingly informed him, in honour. I am afraid he would not have thought very much of that if it had not been for two or three letters that he considered bound him too.

Clare had been prudence and coyness itself, or these letters, which more than hinted at marriage, might never have been written. Her staidness and prudence

were never more manifest than in the manner with which Audley Dale was lured by a cold, passionless, nature and a plain face, to imagine he felt a passion which the woman who he thought had inspired it could never have created in any man. She had made him think himself in love, or rather—he being just at that age when a boy can hardly fancy himself a man without having a passion of some kind or other, just as he must smoke cigars, if they make him sick, when he would much rather be sucking oranges; drink pale ale and cold brandy-and-water, when he would ten times sooner have ginger-beer—she had contrived to throw herself in his way, and make herself the object of the feelings which he thought it incumbent upon him to entertain.

A little while after Audley Dale had received his commission as cornet in the —3rd, his father received great and unexpected promotion—such promotion

as sometimes falls to men less for what they do than for what they do not. He was nearly sixty. He had passed a long life in the most blameless obscurity. Nobody could say that the Rev. Theophilus Dale had ever written, said, or done, any one thing which he should not. He had preached sermons that were of the mildest and safest character. He was of the tamest and discreetest order of Anglicans—looking upon Ritualism with a mild wonder, as a singular eccentricity of the times; upon Evangelicalism with a slight dislike, and a suspicion that it might go too far. Of the Broad Church and its muscular disciples he had seen little. Shoreleigh, where he had spent the thirty years of his pastoral life, had no clerical residents near him tainted with the views either of Colenso or of the authors of the “*Essays and Reviews*.” It had been a quiet little nook, where the sheep browsed peacefully, undisturbed by strange tenets, and their pastor fed

them with the safest and mildest doctrine. He fed them, too, with other things—with beef and bread at Christmas, and soup all the winter through; doing his duty after his own fashion, in as quiet and inoffensive a way as any nineteenth-century rector could do it: and was as much astonished as anybody else when the Bishopric of Drowsehead was offered him.

But the Dales were a rising family. How very much they were rising even the Rev. Theophilus Dale did not know. Two generations back the then head of the family had been elevated to the peerage, and he and his sons after him had made themselves very useful to the government; so useful that when the Bishopric of Drowsehead became vacant they thought they had a right to hint that it could not be better conferred than on a member of their house. There could not possibly be a more decorous or a safer man chosen for the vacant post than their kinsman. His very

insignificance, in all but family connection, was a recommendation to the minister, who had recently made some episcopal appointments which had brought much odium on him, through his selecting men who were too clever or too unpleasantly prominent in one way or another. Now and then, certainly—as Mrs. Thornton had said when thinking of her own husband's chances of preferment—a bishop is chosen for his brains: but *is* the choice ever a popular one? Well, nobody could say that the Rev. Theophilus Dale had been chosen for his; but he was likely to be a bishop quite up to the average, notwithstanding. He left Shoreleigh—the poor were very sorry; it was not likely that another rector would come whose soup would be so good, and who would look over their short-comings in the way of church attendance, as leniently as he did. He was near-sighted, too, and what a blessing that is in a rector who preaches long sermons, and whose people

are inclined to doze on summer afternoons, after a hard week's work ! Miss Dale left too. She had nothing to induce her to stay at Shoreleigh, when her brother's family had gone. She did not like Drowsehead, where the air was too relaxing, but decided on residing at Wearmouth, which she thought might suit her, and which had the advantage of being only five miles away from Tring, a living in the Bishop's gift, and to which he intended to appoint his eldest son, Maurice, on the death of the then incumbent, who, at the time of the Bishop's accession, was ninety, and who dying, with great consideration, six months after that event, Miss Dale had the satisfaction of having her nephew at once near her.

She did not enjoy the satisfaction long.

Perhaps Wearmouth was too bracing—perhaps she missed the daily influx of girls and boys, the flow of young life around her, to which she had been accustomed

for years. But she had not been a twelve-month in her new residence, before she left it for a permanent one; and her invaluable waiting-maid found herself again thrown on the world, without even a legacy to comfort her for her mistress's loss—that lady having put off will-making day after day, till at last the day came when the doing so was quite beyond her.

Clare confidently expected that the bishop's daughters would give her a place about themselves, but they did not seem disposed to do so, behaving, Clare considered, with shameful ingratitude, in not studying her interests better. In truth, her "dear young ladies" were not too fond of their aunt's pattern waiting-maid; they had the instinctive dislike which most women entertained, without knowing why, for that very proper young person, and, except that they gave her very excellent mourning, which Clare had made up very becomingly, she in no way benefited by the death of her patroness.

Just at this time Mrs. Thornton returned from her honeymoon, and Clare offered her services as parlour-maid, Deb, who had been the Rector's factotum before, requiring some assistance now. The duties of the situation were light; it was near Tring, where one of the Dales resided, and where another might reasonably be expected to come some day. Clare was content to take it while waiting for what the future might bring forth, and congratulated herself on her wisdom in doing so, when, in the second year of her service, the —3rd was quartered in the barracks, and Mr. Audley Dale, now a grown man, might be seen almost daily in the streets of the town, or lounging on the sands of its sea shore.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. THORNTON'S GOOD ADVICE.

MRS. THORNTON had a purpose in taking her walk on the sands this morning. She meant, if possible, to meet Audley Dale, and remonstrate with him on the exceeding folly of his conduct. "Nothing good *can* come of it," she said to herself. "If it had been a pretty actress, now, there might have been something to be said for him. I think an affair of that kind, at the beginning of a young man's career, is rather beneficial than otherwise. It polishes them up. I've done a good deal for Audley Dale, but he's very

much in want of forming still. Well, he may be, if he has such tastes as these."

The "season," such as it was, was at its height in Wearmouth. Consequently the sands presented a far livelier scene than they had done the preceding night. The tide was too low for bathing, but there were more people lounging to and fro on the promenade and the pier. Mrs. Thornton did not go on the latter—you caught the wind too much there, and it was apt to derange the hair—but she walked to and fro on the sands, just at that part most especially favoured by visitors, and not one of these but looked at her with the attention her very striking appearance was calculated to call forth.

Several of the officers of the —3rd were there, a bright sunshiny day like this being sure to call these warriors from their own quarters, to bask in the sunshine, and the bright eyes that would then be abroad. All these recognized, and were recognized

in turn by, Mrs. Thornton, but not one would she allow to accompany her. "Mrs. Rushington may have them all to-day," she said to herself. "I only want Audley Dale."

Presently she saw him. He came on with a slow step, and a face that did not give one the impression of his being quite at ease.

"That poor fellow knows he's got into a mess," said Mrs. Thornton to herself, "and don't know how to get out of it. There's Mrs. Rushington laid hold of him—Milly's with her. Now, will he come, or will he stay with them? I'll never forgive him if he does. After this morning he may devote himself to Milly as much as he pleases, but just now I do want him all to myself."

Right in the sun, as if coveting his beams to light up their bravery, three ladies sat, forming a mass of colour that in itself was attractive enough, even if the faces underneath the plumed hats had not been so. But

the faces were attractive in the opinion of all the officers of the —3rd ; at least, of those who, being unmarried, had any right to think of faces at all ; and there was quite a cluster of them round the seat which the fair trio occupied.

“How that Mrs. Rushington *does* go on !” said Mrs. Thornton, as she eyed this group. “I *do* think, when a woman’s turned forty, and has got a daughter nearly as tall as herself, it’s time to give up flirting.”

Then she seated herself on a bench, at a considerable distance from the group she was eyeing, but still quite near enough for any one of them to see her. She spread out her dress, and the sea-breeze fluttered its folds, and sent her ribbons flying in the air. She was as bright to look at as the group round whom the officers had gathered, and from which she wished to draw one.

“I *do* hope that Audley will come. He can’t say he does n’t see me.”

“That woman’s bent on making herself conspicuous,” thought Mrs. Rushington. “I know she’s sitting there to catch Audley Dale—and he’s going!”

He lounged off presently, looking, by the morning light, handsome enough to excuse a lady’s wishing to keep him by her side. He was fair, and thin, and tall, with a slight moustache and fair wavy hair. It was a boyish face still, though he was twenty-four, but notwithstanding his public school education, and the finishing touches which his regimental training had given him, to say nothing of Mrs. Thornton’s tutelage, he had not grown very far into his manhood. There was a weakness and an irresolution about the face; it might pass away in time, as the character developed and strengthened—if development and strength should come—but at present there was good reason for Mrs. Thornton to feel, as she looked on him, “He’s only a boy after all, and an artful hussy like

Clare might do anything she liked with him."

And as she looked, a very magnanimous resolution, which had presented itself to her the preceding night, and with which neither her husband nor Mrs. Rushington, nor a great many people beside, would have credited her, became confirmed. "It's the only thing for him," she thought. "Nothing but a positive engagement will keep him out of this scrape."

There was plenty of room on the bench she occupied for Mr. Audley Dale to seat himself beside her, but she did not want him there. She liked better to have him bending over her, and obliged to take a little trouble to hear what she had to say. Also this gave her an excuse for looking back at him and making play with her magnificent eyes.

In spite of that very magnanimous resolution of hers—although she meant to tell him to give himself up in good earnest to

the pursuit of another—still she wanted to keep him just a little. She did not care one whit for the reality—it would really have bored her to have had him in love with her—but she liked the semblance of his devotion. Even if he married, which was just what she intended to tell him to do, she should still wish to preserve his friendship,—and friendship between a woman like Mrs. Thornton and a gentleman of Audley Dale's age means a great many *petits soins*, and a degree of *empressement* and homage, which, if it has not the warmth, has very much the look of love-making.

Audley Dale had to lean over her now, and listen to what she had to say. It was in full sight of the lady to whom she wished him to give his allegiance, but that did not matter; Miss Lisdale was not to have him *all*. Friendship had its claims and its privileges, and Mrs. Thornton was not going to give up hers. As he leaned,

some one also saw him besides the gay group in the distance. Mr. Thornton had been called out that morning to a man in his last illness. He was proceeding to him now along the sands, the cottage to which he was bound being at the extreme end of his parish, and near the shore. He was full of his work, thinking what he should best say to the dying sinner, who had never entered his church, who had openly scoffed at him and all ministers of religion, but who now, when the dark waters of death were threatening to submerge him, had cried, "Help, or I perish!"

He was going to see this man, whose life, by all report, had been one long sin, who had set God at defiance, and lived as if good were not in the world. His danger was imminent. The message sent had intimated that he could hardly last out the day, and before him was the judgment with its terrors—heaven or hell, with its joys or horrors. Things as true to the Rector as

the ground he walked on, or the sea beside him. That unseen world, with its awful depths of endless anguish, its never-ending pangs, its unfathomable darkness, on the one hand—and its bliss, of which no tongue can tell, which the poet's wildest imaginings could only shadow faintly, with its white-robed angels and never-ending songs of praise and triumph,—was as real to this man as the forms and shapes around him, as the voices and laughter borne on the sea-breeze, as the men and women passing to and fro, as the home which he had left, as the cottage to which he was hastening—as the two sitting on yon bench, wrapped up in each other's converse, and apparently oblivious of him, and of aught but themselves in the world.

There they were. His wife, and the man to whom he had forbidden her to speak — shameless ! lost — insensate ! — Would nothing serve them, but that in the eyes of all they must proclaim their

sinful weakness? Had his wife chosen the most public spot of all wherein to sit and defy him? They did not see him—to all appearance they saw nothing but each other. What was it—what could it be, but love in its intensest and guiltiest form, which could blind them thus, not only to his anger but to all conventionalities? He knew too little of the world to know how far a woman may go, and yet have no severer censure cast on her than for levity. Flirtation—platonic friendships—all the borderland between passion and indifference were unknown to him. Mrs. Rushington had been quite long enough in his parish for him to have learned a little from her, but he had never thought of watching Mrs. Rushington. Once or twice he had seen things in her which had made him think her not altogether the fittest guardian for a young girl, nor so staid and decorous as a matron of her years should be, but he had withheld his judgment and abstained

from condemnation. It would have been well if he had been equally tolerant and patient with his wife.

All the prayers which he had been turning over in his mind as fit to offer up left him now—all the words which he had been stringing together as calculated to awaken the sinner to a sense of his desperate condition, were washed from the tablet of his mind, just as the waves of the sea, as they poured in, washed away the footprints of the children who had been playing on the sands. For a moment he stood convulsed with shame and anger ; then he recovered himself. “I will put all thoughts of this woman and her sin away—I will go upon my Master’s work, and, till I have done it, she and her guiltiness shall trouble me no more.”

By a strong effort he did it. Turned his head away, and went resolutely on ; and Mrs. Thornton and Audley Dale, who had seen nothing of the stern eyes fixed upon them, continued their conversation.

The lady had assumed a maternal tone—she did now and then to Audley, and when they were alone she called him by his Christian name. She did so now.

“I was very much vexed by something I saw from my bedroom window last night,” she said. “I need n’t tell you, Audley, what it was. How *can* you be so foolish? You do n’t know to what this kind of thing may lead—besides the bad taste of it!—The utter absurdity altogether.”

The young man coloured while she spoke. He understood her; but then it was a difficult subject to discuss with a lady—even with Mrs. Thornton, who was not just like other ladies. Of all but utter folly he knew himself to be innocent, but then how could he tell her even that?—He was more concerned about Mrs. Thornton’s share in the conversation than she was for herself. He felt much more awkward than she did, who was quite prepared to speak of the matter as lightly as one man would

to another. Men often *did* speak to Mrs. Thornton as if she were one of themselves. Perhaps her being so constituted that they could do so was one chief reason why, with all her beauty, with all the admiration she had inspired in the many who had looked upon her face and listened to her voice, her own husband was the only one who had ever loved her. She was not masculine, and certainly not mannish, but she would speak of things that women are shy of speaking of, and let them be spoken of in her presence without reproof, meaning all the time to be as staid and decorous as any rector's wife should be. It was not ignorance on her part. She had had plenty of opportunities of learning otherwise; it was not stupidity, for she was a clever woman; it was rather a want of that fine inner sense of modesty—the reverence which womanliness owes to itself, and so unconsciously exacts from others. Audley Dale, if not a very wise young man, was not a bad one.

Even all the pollutions that a boy must pass through in a classical training had not neutralized the effect that his sisters, and his mother in her lifetime, had had upon him, and he hesitated and stammered now, less because he was ashamed of the folly to which Mrs. Thornton had alluded, than because he did not know how to speak of it to her.

She spared him the necessity of replying.

"I see you are sorry for it," she said. "Be guided by me, and break it off altogether. Don't come near our place for a little while. I shall see quite enough of you as it is. I've spoken to Clare, and I think she has grace enough to be ashamed of herself. What an ugly creature she is, to be sure! Now, I've something else to propose. Do you know, I think the very best thing possible would be for you to marry?"

He could answer her now, and he did

with a light laugh, colouring up, however, the while.

“Find me the means first. You would not have me take my wife to the barracks?”

“No—you ought to marry sensibly. I don’t say for money, entirely; but get money. Your family and profession are in your favour. You’re tolerably good-looking, without flattery, and Mrs. Rushington over there would almost give her eyes to have you for her son-in-law.”

“And Mrs. Rushington’s daughter?” His tone was a little ruffled. The colour on his cheeks had deepened, and he looked flushed as if with excitement. Was it possible that he was not prepared to carry on the discussion as coolly as Mrs. Thornton seemed disposed to do?

“Oh, a girl of that age can be done anything with, only take her in time. In Miss Lisdale’s case, I should say, especially—take her in time. She’s a shrewd, sensible

girl, and will soon be aware of the advantages on her side. Just now, her mother is only disposed to think of those on yours. It won't be very long before she outgrows what little influence her mother has over her. Just now, if exercised in your direction, it might have some sway. You want a wife—if only to keep you clear of such a piece of folly as you've been lately led into. Milly Lisdale is just the girl for you : staid, quiet, fairly pretty, and good style." Mrs. Thornton prided herself on always giving other women their full meed of praise, and to do her justice she generally gave good measure. "She has as much money as I should think you have any right to expect ; has a fair share of common sense, and is, I fancy, a little commonplace. All the better — those kind of women always make the best wives and the happiest."

Then she sighed. Of course the sigh meant to imply that she was not common-

place, and not happy, but Mr. Audley Dale did not care to understand her.

“Thank you,” he said, “for the honour you have done me in thinking so much of my interests, but I am afraid I have hardly given the subject sufficient consideration, as yet.” He was longing to tell her he resented hearing Miss Lisdale’s name in her mouth—that to hear her spoken of by any one, in the tone Mrs. Thornton had used, was insufferable to him; but how could he? That would have been telling too much—more than, till now, he was aware of himself. Mrs. Thornton would never have understood it, but it is quite possible for a man in the first dawn of his early love to be as tender, and coy, and reverential over it as a girl over hers.

She continued—“Now, I wish you to think it over, and promise me—no, don’t promise, for if you can’t see the necessity of breaking off this other absurd affair, without being bound by your word, a pro-

mise won't influence you. Break the thing off at once and for ever—the sharpest measures are the best, and in the long run the kindest. Now, I think I must be going home. I've got to meet the Soup and Blanket Committee. Mrs. Rushington's on it ; but she hardly ever comes—when she does, I think we should get on better without her. You'll be at her garden party to-morrow ? I hope I shall see that you've profited by the good advice I've given you."

Then she walked on, leaving him about as thankful for her good advice as the recipients of such benevolence generally are.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. RUSHINGTON.

IT is quite time she was introduced at full length. It is only her due not to leave her any longer in the background, Mrs. Rushington's place on any scene being decidedly in the front. She was certainly handsome, and, at first sight, much in the same style as Mrs. Thornton ; but a second look revealed a great difference between the two. Both were pale and colourless, but Mrs. Thornton's pallor gave the impression of ill-health, of a life that had been lived too fast. It seemed hardly natural to her, as if the roses would have bloomed there

had they not been withered away. That was the reason rouge, when she dared use it, improved her so much, which it would never have done to Mrs. Rushington, whose paleness was of a healthier kind altogether, a clear olive tint, giving the impression of perfect health. Any colour on *that* face would have seemed as impertinent as on a statue's. Her hair was black like Mrs. Thornton's, but not with the same blackness. It had neither the glossiness nor the ripple ; it was the blackness of midnight, rather than that of the raven's wing, which the other's resembled. Her features were good, but in the least degree heavy ; you would think of the sphinx, of the Egyptian countenance at its best, as you looked at them. Mrs. Thornton's would remind you of a Roman contadina transferred for her beauty to some alien sphere, and so paled and worn before her time.

Mrs. Rushington's deep velvety eyes never sparkled with the glitter and light

that shone in the other's ; they were languid, pleading, tender, indolent—the ox-eyes of Juno, some one once called them in Mrs. Thornton's hearing, and she, who was not always good-natured when speaking of Mrs. Rushington, said that there certainly was something altogether bovine about her. She was large and tall ; a goddess amongst women, and if her manners had been in keeping with her physique, they ought to have been stately and impassive ; instead of which Mrs. Rushington, though she did not deserve to be called a “ frisky matron,” was certainly a gushing one. She was forty-two, and impulsive as a girl ; much more so than her own daughter ; a desperate flirt, candidly owning that she liked homage, and doing her best to win it.

But no one ever said or thought ill of Mrs. Rushington ; and there was this great difference between her and Mrs. Thornton—no man, let him admire her as boldly as he

might, ever forgot the fact of her womanliness. She might be worshipped, and she liked worship, but she stood on a pedestal to receive it. There was no possibility of treating her as *bonne camarade*, or of indulging in the freedom of allusion which Mrs. Thornton permitted. If any one had ever done so, Mrs. Rushington would have opened her great velvety eyes, and looked at the offender in utter, blank, apparent incomprehension of his meaning, but he would have been banished from her presence thenceforth; no second chance would have been given him of offending. She always had her court around her, but the courtiers were kept in admirable order.

She was like most large women, languid in her movements, but there was an immense fund of vivacity and impetuosity underneath, which very often drew her into slight sins against the minor *convenances*. She professed to have a profound regard for etiquette, but was constantly violating it; she be-

lieved herself profoundly versed in knowledge of the world, but had a naiveté which is very rarely met with in a school-girl of our day ; she had the slightest lisp in the world, which gave an infantine simplicity to her utterance, and she was simple in many things beside ; only in the main her intense womanliness kept her straight, and kept other people about her straight too, where another woman with the same amount of vanity and half the beauty would have found it very difficult indeed to have kept, in appearance at least, from slightly swerving from the path it behoved her to tread.

And, as I said, nobody ever thought any harm about Mrs. Rushington ; she was a privileged person. Thinking of her and Mrs. Thornton one instinctively recalls the proverb of the favoured individual who may steal the horse while his luckless compeer dare not look over the hedge.

Mrs. Rushington had a husband, just as

she had a riding-horse, and a pony-carriage, a house and a conservatory ; but it was not from him she derived the prefix to her name, but from the Honourable Percy Lisdale, whom she had married when she was one-and-twenty, who had run through half her money—she having unfortunately been an orphan and her own mistress when she took him—and would have run through the other half had he not died first. She was not very sorry—he had not been a pattern husband—and she married again two years later, but this time was wiser in money matters, having her own fortune settled on herself, while Milly was amply provided for under her father's will, he having lived just long enough to bequeath to her the ten thousand pounds which a great aunt had left to him. “Tie it up tight,” he said to the lawyer when he gave him directions, “tie it up tight. There's not one man in a thousand fit to be trusted with the spending his wife's money.” And he certainly had

not been the one in the thousand. So Milly was well provided for, and so was her mother.

Mr. Rushington's income was not large, but with what his wife added to it, was enough for comfort. He was a barrister by profession, but as she told her friends, with that charming candour which distinguished her, she believed he had never had a brief in his life, and would n't have known what to do with one if he had. On his marriage, he had given up whatever faint hope he might have had of sitting on the woolsack, and devoted the rest of his days to the pursuit of photography, and to the filling his post as Mrs. Rushington's husband in a manner worthy of the dignity to which she had raised him. He was very quiet, very gentlemanly, and very inoffensive ; an obedient, well trained man, who would have filled the post of Prince Consort, if it had fallen to his share, with all due decorum and propriety, and indeed to be Mrs.

Rushington's husband was not much better than being a Prince Consort in private life.

Mrs. Rushington had taken the house where they now lived. Previously they had been travelling on the Continent, with a view of perfecting Milly's accent—so her mother said—then she considered it time to settle, "Take a place and a certain position, John," she gravely said to her husband, "and bring Milly out into society."

Beechside, at Wearmouth, presented itself as a suitable residence. The house was a good one—a modern villa—substantially built, and fronting the sea, lying between the more populous portion of Wearmouth, and that quieter part included in St. Hilda parish. A little distance, too, from the row or two of terraces and parades that had sprung up for the benefit of the visitors to the place. The grounds were well laid out, if not

very large, and they were surrounded by a stone wall, which gave sufficient privacy to Mrs. Rushington's garden parties whenever she held them. Of course what little society there was in Wearmouth gathered round her. . She was its acknowledged leader before she had been six months in the place. The "Honourable" had a great deal to do with it—they thought much of that at Wearmouth—though some said that as Mrs. Rushington only derived it from her first husband, she ought to have relinquished it upon marrying a second.

All the clergy were hospitably entertained by her. She was not particular as to their different shades of opinion. Church was church according to her, and whether high or low, broad or narrow, mattered very little. She always went, as a matter of principle, to St. Hilda, and believed its Rector to be one of the cleverest men in the world. She did not care very much

for his wife—it was not that she was jealous of her, but few women ever did take cordially to Mrs. Thornton; and now and then, when decorum was strong upon Mrs. Rushington, she intimated to her husband her opinion that Mrs. Thornton was not just the sort of person for Milly to know.

Milly herself thought differently. She got on very well with Mrs. Thornton; and whatever latent motherliness there might be in the other's heart, was called up by her. She really liked Milly—she would have liked to see very much more of her than she did, if her mother would but have permitted; but Mrs. Rushington had her prejudices at times, and she did not like to see Milly with a woman of whose antecedents she had her suspicions.

Milly herself gave way to her mother, to some extent; but she liked Mrs. Thornton. She was clever, and had some-

thing to talk about; and Milly had not the highest opinion of her mother's wisdom. She was a sensible, well-bred girl, not remarkably pretty; but, what was far more in her mother's eyes, with an unmistakable air of good-breeding about her.

"I wouldn't have cared how plain she was," said Mrs. Rushington, "if only she had style, and thank heaven she has that. It would have been too hard upon me if she had n't."

Milly managed her mamma pretty well, by never openly opposing her; and to some extent she let her have her own way in this matter of Mrs. Thornton. Somehow it was tacitly understood between Milly and her step-father that Mrs. Rushington was to be managed, humoured, indulged, and let to have her own way just as much as was good for her. They would never have owned it, for the world, to each other; but they treated her like a

great spoiled child. In this family, though very few outsiders knew it, the position of mother and daughter was pretty well reversed.

Milly took much better care of her mother than her mother did of her ; and, all the time, Mrs. Rushington imagined herself the most prudent of matrons, the most wary of mothers, and that, unless in a convent, no girl could be kept under a stricter *régime* than her own.

Milly was quite content ; she had as much liberty as she wanted, and a great deal more than it would have been wise to have allowed many girls. She listened to her mamma's lectures on the *bienséances* with the utmost decorum, and had her own way in a great many things besides that of visiting Mrs. Thornton, without her mother having the remotest idea that Milly's way and her own were entirely different ; or that when she dilated to her husband on the enormous difficulty of

disposing of a girl in Milly's position, in a suitable manner, Milly had in some sort settled the matter by mentally, at least, disposing of herself. •

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING ON THE SANDS.

AUDLEY DALE remained for some little time where Mrs. Thornton had left him, chewing the cud of fancy that had very little sweetness in it. What on earth did she mean by talking to him like that about Milly Lisdale? Could n't a man look, at a girl, talk to her, show a little pleasure in her society, but that he must be set down at once as in love with her: or what was worse—ten times worse—his cheek flushed angrily at the thought—she in love with him!—Milly of all girls, who was as good as gold, and worth a

dozen such as her own mother and Mrs. Thornton put together. *She* to be spoken of as if she were ready to fling herself at a man's head for the sake of his family and connections, and buy him with her money, if she did not become aware too soon how much that money ought to buy for her.

If he had only paused to analyze his emotions—which he never did, as we none of us ever do—he would have discovered that this very anger at Mrs. Thornton's interference — this resentment at Miss Lisdale's name being uttered as she had uttered it, were tolerable indications of the state of his feelings for her. But he did nothing of the kind, only pushed the sand impatiently to and fro with his foot, as if he were trying to dig a hole in it; and presently glancing at the bench Mrs. Rushington and her daughter had occupied, and seeing it vacant, made up his mind to return to the barracks at once.

There was a way of getting to them without going through the town, and this way, being much the quieter of the two, suited Audley Dale this morning. It took him by the sands; and as soon as he had left the part most frequented by visitors, it was secluded enough, leading past the martello towers, and here and there the cottage of an outlying parishioner of St. Hilda. This was just what Audley Dale wanted this morning. He had been troubled enough by what had taken place the previous night. The chains which he had forged in his folly had been pulled just tightly enough to remind him that they were still in existence; and then Mrs. Thornton was aware of his folly, and had favoured him with her advice. As if it was so easy to take it—as if it was so easy to throw a woman aside, when he had been fool enough, in his own hand, to promise her, almost in so many words, that he would make her his wife!

And through it all, Milly's sweet, good face was before him. If he was weak, at least he was not wicked, and amidst all this trouble into which he had plunged, the bewilderment caused by advice being given him which he was unable to follow, and by other advice which he would have been only too glad to have followed if he could, the thought of the girl who he had said was as "good as gold," came to torment instead of soothing him, weighing him down with a sense of shame and unworthiness.

"If I do n't get her," he said, "it'll be all my own fault; if that Jezebel does as she promised and consults a lawyer, and so makes me the laughing stock of the whole county, it'll be no more than I deserve. I shall sell out in that case and take the first ship to New Zealand, look out for a spot where no English papers can reach me, and where I sha'n't have the least chance of hearing when Milly Lisdale has married

some fellow who, it's to be hoped, won't be half such a fool as I've been."

As he went along, thinking himself the most miserable being in existence, and not comforted at all by remembering how much of his misery was caused by his folly, he saw the tall, spare figure of the Rector of St. Hilda in the distance. Just then these two had all of the shore that was in sight to themselves. The one had left the town, the pier, and the parade, behind him, and, the beach here forming a small bay, they were shut out from his sight: the other had just quitted the cottage to which he had been summoned, a lonely hut, standing quite apart, some distance from the town, and with not another dwelling beyond it on the opposite side for miles.

He had been standing almost face to face with death. Doing his best to bring the sinner to repentance, and avert the terrors of the coming doom. In that unseen world to which the miserable

wretch to whom he had been ministering was hastening *he believed*. He believed with all his heart and soul the awful tidings he had had to tell—the impending hell, the possible heaven. It was all as real, as true to him as the earth on which he walked—the sea, whose murmurs were in his ears. He had been with a soul that was all but lost, he had been telling it how salvation might be attained, in the same spirit in which he might have held out a rope to a drowning creature sinking in the waves. He had been wrestling with all his force in prayer, trying his best to bring before this perishing outcast the only means by which safety from everlasting doom might be obtained. Had he succeeded? Who could tell? A fierce paroxysm of pain had made the patient incapable of attending to his ministrations, and this had been succeeded by a fit of utter unconsciousness; it was more than possible that on this death might supervene, that before

he returned in the evening he should find the wild, reckless life had closed without a sign. Had he gathered this perishing soul within the fold—had it been given him to save it for evermore? If only he could have known! If only the age of miracles had not been wholly past, and that from sea or sky some breath might whisper, some sign arise that evil had lost its hold, and that there was yet one more penitent over whom the starry hosts might rejoice with trembling!

And in this frame of mind he saw the man advancing towards him whom of all others in the world he believed his greatest enemy. Not yet in deed—he had spoken to himself of shame and sin, but he had only meant the light looks, the unseemly words, the profane thoughts, that were as yet only the preludes to the deeper wrong that might come. Coming as he did from a sinner dying, and, perhaps, unpardoned, earth seemed so little, his own hurt, his

own passions, so insignificant compared to the imminent peril of a lost soul. Was there not one all but lost before him? Was it not his duty as priest, as God's appointed minister, to warn this one of the error of his ways? to bid him turn aside while yet there was time? What was his own private sorrow in the matter? What was it that this sinner had sinned against himself? that, if not warned, he might do him the deadliest wrong one man could work another? Should he be dumb and mute for that? should he lift no voice of warning, because in this matter it might seem as if he were the last who should speak? What were all the conventionalities of life, the forms that men made chains of for themselves, to the chance of turning the sinner from the error of his ways, and bringing the wicked to repentance?

He came up to Audley Dale accordingly with outstretched hand, instead of passing him by, as he had meant before to do, with

averted eyes ; and Audley, who was blissfully unconscious of having given offence, took the hand and wondered what Mr. Thornton had to say to him. He wondered still more when he did hear what he had to say.

“I am about to speak to you on a matter which perhaps is the very last that you and I should be expected to discuss. When the domestic peace of a man is invaded the invader is generally considered the very last he should address.”

“That confounded Clare !” thought Audley. “Hang it ! I’m to catch it from him as well as from Mrs. Thornton. Did he see me, too, last night ?”

“I am not influenced by conventionalities—where I see a wrong I think I should point it out—where a misdoer, I should warn him. If the wrong affects myself, if the misdoing is to my own hurt, is that any reason why I should desist from telling the transgressor to pause in time,

to pause before weakness and folly, born perhaps of idleness, may become sin and undoing ; to remember that there is another beside himself, that—oh ! if *he* cannot think for her, how can *I* bring myself to speak of the woman in this case ?”

“He’s a trump, to take it to heart like that,” thought Audley, impressed by the passionate earnestness of the man before him. In all his easy-going days he had never met anything like it. His father was decorum itself ; but when he had to deal with sin, with the hard ugly things underlying all our smooth, bland civilization, he did so with a suave evasiveness, passing on, looking another way, as the Priest and the Levite did to that unpleasant-looking person, the wounded traveller. There were awkward things in the world ; all people were not as nice and as well-behaved as they should be ; but the less said about such matters the better—they were not things to be discussed in a pulpit or before young people. As to

Audley's brother, the Rev. Maurice Dale, *he* was earnest enough in his way, but then it was earnestness of another sort altogether to Mr. Thornton's. To think of this man wearing so grave a face because his waiting-woman had been detected in impropriety which might lead to harm! Audley felt grieved for him, and ashamed of himself. "I am very sorry," he began.

"I hope you mean it," said the other, impressively. "I know too well how men of the world—men of *this* world, at least—look on such matters: it is but a woman lost and undone, only a home dishonoured, a life worse than lost—they have had their play, and another pays the cost. If I dared to speak to you of other and of higher things I would. Surely to *you* I ought to dare, to *you*, trained in a Christian home, and bearing the name you do, you at least ought to be that rare thing, a Christian soldier—one who holds his duty to his God dearer even than his duty to his queen—

you at least must know the inevitable outcome of such a course—the wages of sin, into which, however pleasant the fruit, transgression surely ripens.”

“I never was more ashamed of myself in my life,” said Audley. “I give you my honour, you shall have no cause to complain of me again.” “Hang that Jezebel,” aside, “if he only knew what a fix I’m in with her !”

“I wish I could think so,” said the other eagerly; “having spoken to you, not so much as one gentleman to another who has forgotten the trust placed in him, but rather as God’s minister, warning one that if he sins against him, he sins yet more deeply against another and an infinitely higher, I wish I could feel that it will be as you say.”

“I know all that, my dear sir,” gasped Audley, all his usual nerve and self-confidence paralysed by the intense earnestness of the man who was speaking to him, and feeling more like a boy called to order by

his schoolmaster than he had ever yet done in all his boyish life—"but—but—upon my soul—no, I mean upon my honour—on my word, you make too much of it. The whole thing has been the sheerest, maddest folly on my part. I wish I could explain, I wish I could tell—but there, the whole thing is unworthy the troubling you with. I have been sorry for it all along. How the devil I got drawn into it—I mean, how ever it happened, is more than I can say. But there, I hope you will believe me when I assure you, that if I have acted like a fool in this matter, that is the utmost of my offending, and that it shall never be the cause of annoyance to you again."

"I believe you, and I hope, with all my heart, that *you* will believe I have spoken not only out of regard to myself but to you. In such a matter a man might well be excused for being selfish, but I don't think I have been entirely so."

"Of course not—good heavens, no!

There are very few who would take such a matter to heart as you have done, or give an offender a warning so kindly. I owe you a thousand thanks—and—and—you'll not be too hard on her."

"Is it for you to become her intercessor?" cried the other, in a tone whose sharp pain Audley Dale failed to understand. "*Hard* on her! Might it not be better if I could be?" And a change passed over his face, such as might be caused by some sharp paroxysm of pain. For a moment the lips quivered, as if they found speech impossible, then he waved Audley Dale away—"We will go our separate ways now, but I think we shall tread them more peacefully because of this meeting."

"I hope so! To think of my folly causing you so much vexation! But I wish you could believe that it has been only folly——"

"If I believed that it was more,"—and now there was a light in Harold Thornton's

eyes that said "dangerous," the light of the wild beast nature underlying all that saintly life, all those beliefs in the unseen, all that faith in dogmas and creeds by which it had been tamed and kept down—"if I thought that it was, *as yet*, anything else, though I have come from the death-bed of a sinner hastening to that eternity upon whose brink we are all standing, though I am God's minister, sworn heart and soul to do His work, to offer my own feelings, my own passions, as the most acceptable sacrifices on His altar—I think—I think the natural man would rise within me, and it would be scarcely safe for us two to stand as we are doing, face to face, upon these sands. No, young man, I *do* acquit you of aught but folly—had I dreamed of anything more, it would have been righted in another manner."

Then the two did go on their separate ways, and Audley Dale said to himself—

"Well out of that at last. I think that

poor fellow is half crazed. I'll talk this over with Masters, and, somehow or other, he must see me out of this scrape with Clare. Hang the jade! To think of her bringing a sermon like this upon me! to say nothing of Mrs. Thornton's lecture. A hard morning's work I've had of it between the two."

And as Mr. Thornton went on, his thoughts were—

"Have I spoken effectually? Have I been too harsh with him? Have I held out threats where I should only have used persuasion? I think not, I hope not. He took it all in good part—in better part than I could have dared to hope for—and he has given me his word that this folly shall cease. He stands on his honour now—the vainest, idlest thing it seems of all—and yet such men as he are bound by it, where religion would fail to persuade, where virtue would fail to move. His honour! he holds by it more than by Heaven, would abide

by it rather than by God. Well, it is his God ! and by *his* God he has sworn to me. Surely I may be content—and yet, if I could only have brought him to the feet of mine !”

CHAPTER IX.

AUDLEY DALE ASKS COUNSEL, AND HAS
IT GIVEN.

MAURICE DALE'S Rectory and pastoral fold were exactly five miles from the farthest point of Wearmouth. A lonely place, with a few fishers' huts for habitation, one gentleman's house which had not been occupied for twenty years, another, with whose owner the young Rector was not on good terms, a church, bare, plain and ugly, with one bell, and that cracked : flat, unlovely scenery, a wide expanse of sand and coast in front, a wider expanse of downs, where stunted

herbage only grew, and where stunted sheep fed in the rear. No hedges to divide what few fields there were—few men and women, fewer trees—about as unpromising a place altogether as any young aspirant for success in life could be set down in to begin his career.

The parsonage was a plain, ugly grey stone house, that never looked warm even in summer time ; that chilled you to look upon, even on the sunniest day, as it would to let the eyes rest on a huge block of Wenham ice. In the garden grew a few stunted wallflowers, and there were a few attempts at flower beds, but they were badly kept, and the lawn was rugged and besprinkled with dandelions. A few potatoes and other vegetables were in the rear, but the young Rector did not care very much for horticulture, and left his man of all work—who was pretty well past work altogether—to do as much or as little as he pleased. The front garden was divided from

the road that wound before it by a low stone hedge, and on the inner side of this hedge grew two or three tamarisks, the only green things which flourished here. You could not perceive the sea from the Rectory garden, though you might from one or two of the upper windows, but you could hear its murmur, as indeed you would, go to what part of Tring you might. The ocean seemed the one great living fact in that still place. If it were not for its never-ending voice, you might have been tempted to think that the last day had come and gone, and that the world, having done its work, had gone to sleep for ever.

If one person in the course of an hour passed the Rectory grounds that was the most; so, without scandalizing the proprieties, Maurice Dale and his guest, Temple Masters, could stand on either side the little white painted garden gate and smoke their cigars. Maurice had done his work for the day. He did not delight in early services, there-

fore he never gave them ; but he had visited two old women, and one old man ; given the former tea, and the latter tobacco ; looked in at the school, and wondered why it was that poor people's children had such an especial leaning to dirty noses ; had strolled through the churchyard, and had a little chat with the sexton, then went in to lunch with Temple Masters, who had just come in from fishing, and felt himself a man with his day before him.

How long the days were in that old-world parsonage, and that little sandy nook of the world, with its stillness broken only by the everlasting voice of the ocean, with the little cares, and homely troubles that made up the lives of those around—so little and so homely, and yet so often the page by page, the line by line, by which a whole tragedy was written. It would have been out of the question for any one in the Rev. Maurice Dale's position to have been sent there, had not a combination

of prudential motives dictated his banishment to what might else seem a clerical Siberia.

Tring fell vacant just at an opportune time. It would be an easy position for him to fill, till a better offered itself; and the living was not a very poor one; and the Rev. Maurice would be safe there—out of the way of doing mischief, his father hoped—that is, of saying things which, if they were bad enough in the mouths of laymen, were infinitely worse from the lips of those who were not of the laity. At any rate, if in the stillness of Tring he did say such things as he had said, there would be nobody to hear him.

But the Bishop was mistaken. Nothing is truer than that “Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.” He found—or, if he didn’t, the Bishop, who believed loyally in his Satanic Majesty, gave him the credit of it—plenty for Maurice Dale to do even in Tring. He wasn’t broad

and he wasn't high, and he wasn't low, but he grieved his father just as much as if he had gone to the furthest tether of either one of these extremes. The Bishop had taken things easily ; but it had been with the decorous, gentlemanly ease of days gone by, when there was little expected of the clergy, and neither the press nor the people had Argus eyes for their shortcomings. But Maurice Dale took things easily, after quite another fashion to his father's. If he would only—as so many clergymen of a past day had done—have been content to be a country gentleman of a staid and quiet stamp, it would have been well. He was that—very much more of a country gentleman than he was a priest—indeed, he was not a priest at all ; but he did things and said things that no country gentleman, wise in his generation, would do. He must meddle in politics—the politics of a liberal school—had spoken very plainly about the game laws, and

meddled in some matters in which the Bishop thought it would have been well to have let things alone. The Bishop had never meddled in his life. The bishopric had fallen to him on account of his utter inoffensiveness. None of his people had meddled—they had gone with the tide, and the tide had landed them in pleasant places—the House of Lords and an episcopal palace. That was what had come of not meddling; and what but ruin, or what would be almost as bad, banishment to that penal settlement, Tring, could befall Maurice, who was meddling with everything?

Life was so stagnant at Tring. He couldn't write—at least not anything to boast of. He had no turn for light literature, so he could not solace himself with a weekly box from Mudie's. There was very little society, and that not of a kind that suited him. He fished, but fishing gave him time for thought; and it was thinking,

according to the Bishop, at least, that led him to -stray into forbidden ground, where he should never have disported himself.

He had no taste for his clerical duties. He had been brought up to the Church just as, if he had been a poor man's son, he might have been brought up to be a carpenter's journeyman. He meant to do what was right ; but his work troubled him. He was not quite sure whether he believed all the creeds he had to enunciate, but thought it safest to conclude that he did ; and his sermons were about as good as the average of sermons. It was the week-day part of his labour that wearied him. What should he say to these poor souls with their hard lives—their little cares which were so great to them ? If he could only have set matters straight for each, given one the store pig, paid the other's rent, set this one straight before the world by clearing off his bill at the

general shop, it might have been well enough. He began by doing something of the sort, and found he was impoverishing himself, and making paupers of his peasants, and earning, besides, a very fair stock of ill-will from the neighbouring farmers. He gave up his beneficence, at least he practised it on a smaller scale, and finding it impossible to right matters in Tring, took to trying to right them all over the kingdom.

He had made himself unpleasantly conspicuous—according to the Bishop, flown in the face of the powers that be; he had written to more than one paper on the state of labourers' cottages; he had headed a subscription to reimburse a boy's parents for the expenses they had been put to on account of his picking up a dead leveret. When the lad came out of prison, he was quite a hero in his own eyes, and those of his relatives; and that little dead hare had been worth as much as a whole

poulterer's shop to them. He had insulted the higher authorities—according to the Bishop again—by snatching another boy from their very clutches; a seven-year-old urchin sent to Wichnor Castle for grazing the bark of a tree with his peg top. Maurice Dale had paid the fine, told the bench—some of them his father's most intimate friends—what he thought of them, in that suave, bland tone of his, in which he would utter the most terrible things—terrible, at least, according to the Bishop—and then gone off express to Wichnor Castle, armed with the legal authority to rescue his poor little captive. The Bishop was a miserable man—miserable, at least, whenever he thought of this son of his. If he would go about the country flying in the faces of its rightful rulers, outraging all proprieties and decorums, and standing up for all the dirty little boys who hacked trees or pilfered game, what good would it do the Bishop's soul, even though

he was wrapped in purple and fine linen, and slept under the shadow of a mitre? Maurice Dale was a thorn in the side of that meek man, his father, just the one drop of bitterness infused in the cup which would else have been of such a grateful sweetness.

The Bishop was coming to see Maurice now. To stay with him for a little time, and give him a lecture on the error of his ways. There was to be a charity sermon at St. Mary's, the most important church in Wearmouth, the next Sunday; and the Bishop had been solicited to preach it. He had promised compliance; and Tring being but five miles from the town, he had elected to stay there for some days previous, and take the opportunity to make what impression he could on the mind of his son.

The sermon with which he meant to address *him* had given him very much more trouble than the sermon with which he

was to appeal to the pockets of the parishioners of St. Mary's, Wearmouth.

He was to come that day. As far as he knew how, Maurice had had the Rectory put in order for him ; but it was not at all the kind of place for a bishop to sojourn at. His housekeeper was overpowered by her responsibilities. She was deaf, old, and rheumatic — much could not be expected of her—but Maurice had gone through the rooms himself, done his best to indoctrinate the old lady with his ideas as to a suitable dinner, and now stood at the Rectory gate, wondering how long it would be before the sound of his father's carriage-wheels was heard.

He was very much like his brother Audley, so like that one description may serve for both. They were each a little over the middle height, slight, with fair hair and skin—just the type of Saxon face that you may see at its lowest behind a plough or a flock of sheep, when it is

heavy, but good-humoured, has short hair and blunted features—at its best lounging in clubs or mess-rooms; and then it is languid and bored—and the hair is long and silky, and the features are a little refined and sharpened. It may be that then there is some admixture of the Norman element in it—necessarily, for the face to be in these loftier regions; but it is the Saxons who have left us this face. We never got it from the Danes or any other of the invaders of our soil who have made themselves at home upon it. The brothers had much the same voice, soft, low, but not musical—the well-trained voice of a gentleman. That was what struck you in them both, they were *gentlemen*, men who could not do or say a rude or unkind thing; for Maurice, in his most terrible moments, when the Bishop had most cause to fear for him, was always polite and well-bred. Let him utter the most dreadful truths, the manner in which he expressed them

took away, if not their sting, at least the power of any one resenting too bitterly the wound.

The two were not at all handsome or remarkable in any way—there are thousands of such faces—but they were well enough. They were not particularly clever, but Maurice was certainly the cleverer. If he had not been, the Bishop, with whom a little talent went a very long way, thought that perhaps he never would have got into the mischief he had done.

As Maurice Dale and his guest Temple Masters stood on either side the Rectory-gate, they were a sufficient contrast to each other. Temple was some years the senior, a large, strongly built man, with a face that had fewer claims to beauty than even those of the Dales. At the first sight you would not call him even good looking ; at the next, you would hesitate before pronouncing him ugly ; at the third you would feel that this was a face that had something

in it worth all the good looks in the world. There was promise, strength, intelligence here; it was a reliable face, its owner would make his way; he must be one who would push on in any career he adopted, who would like the road the better for not being too smooth; climb the hill all the more cheerily because of its very steepness. There was power in the overhanging brow, in the dark sunken eyes, the thin set lips, the round prominent chin, and the obstinate combative-looking nose; power in the way the head was set on the shoulders, in the firm tread, the erect, if not graceful carriage. Temple Masters had what women love infinitely more than either intellect, beauty or wealth—strength—that was the charm about him; he was a man to trust in and look up to, every way reliable; women, and some men too, felt that he had the strength of a giant, and it was not very often that he used it like one.

Now and then he did; he was truthful,

kind, fairly gentle, but there was a little hardness underlying it all. He had not had to do with smooth things, having had a very different upbringing to those two young aristocrats the Dales. *His* lines had never fallen in the velvet pastures of a wealthy Rectory.

No coming mitre, no kinsman's coronet had cast their grateful shadows over *his* cradle. He was the son of a poor gentleman, who had left him just enough to pay for his education and to start him at the Bar, and Temple had grown up, knowing very well that he had nothing but his own brains and his own right hand to look to; there were no wealthy relatives on the best terms possible with government, to place stepping-stones in his way. He had everything to achieve for himself, if he was to achieve anything at all.

He was getting on pretty well—that is to say, by dint of a little law reporting which he had managed to get hold of, and by

practising the strictest economy, he was able to make both ends meet and keep out of debt. He would have lived on cheese parings rather than have run *into* debt, but he managed somehow to get something a little better than the parings.

A brief came in now and then, and one or two solicitors, of more discernment than their brethren, spoke well of him, but as yet Temple Masters only had his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder. There it was, reaching up into the clouds above him, with a woolsack for a comfortable resting-place at the very top, and all sorts of good things ; Chief-justiceships, Puisne-judgeships, silk gowns, and three hundred guinea retainers ; at different heights of the ladder. Should he ever get any of them, or was he to be content with just a step or two beyond the bare maintenance he had already secured ? Temple Masters never asked himself the question, never had done so. From the first there had been one

thing which he had taken for secure and certain, and that was ultimate success. Perhaps he might not attain to the very summit of the ladder, but he had made up his mind that he would not be content with anything very much below it.

I have said that the great charm of Temple Masters was the strength which attracted men as well as women. It was so ; in any trouble or emergency, feebler souls were sure to turn to him. He was so reliable, he might mix a little satire with his counsel, have a whip in the very hand which he held out to help, but still the counsel would be worth the taking, and the help would be as readily tendered as the castigation. It was this helpfulness which had made Audley Dale resolve to ask his advice in his present predicament, and he was now coming over from Wearmouth, as fast as a friend's dog-cart would bring him, in order to make a clean breast of everything to Masters, and ask him how he should extri-

cate himself from the dilemma he had been weak enough to get into.

The Bishop was coming to Wearmouth, and perhaps it would have been more dutiful for Audley to have gone to the station to meet his father, and driven over decorously in the fly from there with him. But just now Audley did not feel dutiful ; in fact, he had almost forgotten all about his lordship and the coming charity sermon, and was entirely absorbed in his own troubles.

He had arrived at one conclusion which had made him hasten to borrow the dog-cart of his friend, in order to lose no time about consulting Temple Masters, and that was that it would be a very good thing indeed to take Mrs. Thornton's advice and marry Milly Lisdale. He liked her, he was beginning to be quite sure of that—he liked her—well, perhaps as much as, or more than he could ever like any other girl, and if he could only break with that miserable Clare,

he would propose at once to Milly. She had money—he had thought a good deal about her money, and had not thought at all the less of himself for doing so. It was natural that he should marry a woman with money; he had never been told so in so many words, but somehow the idea had been placed pretty clearly before him. He had his profession and his position, and the lady he married ought to be able to do something towards maintaining the latter; that had always seemed a matter of course, and, therefore, as he really honestly liked Milly, her having money made matters so much the pleasanter. If only Clare, with her white face and her feline movements, her youth that was so unlovely, her grace that was so repulsive, did not stand in the background, a warning figure, like the ghost of his past folly, telling him that for him to settle down in smooth decorous paths, with Milly Lisdale or any other for his wife, should never be while she lived to claim him—to

hold him to her by chains that he had forged in his madness, by ties that had seemed so light when he had woven them in his folly, but that the wisdom he had grown into in his maturer years would find itself taxed to the utmost to break.

The sound of wheels struck on Temple Masters' ear as he stood by the Rectory gate. It was not a grateful sound. This holiday of his had been a rare indulgence; the very stillness and torpidity of the place was grateful after his London work. To stroll on the one bit of beach that permitted walking, to saunter down the narrow lanes, or stand like this with Maurice Dale for company, but not for conversation, this was just what he wanted for rest, and he did not care to have this delicious inertia broken in upon by any other visitor however august. The news of his lordship's impending visit had not been at all grateful to him, but the Bishop had not been expected till the evening and dinner time. What evil wind was

bringing him so much sooner? He took his cigar from his mouth, and looking at Maurice, said, ruefully, "The Bishop?"

"I do n't think he'd come in a dog-cart," said Maurice, "I caught a glimpse of one through the hedge; "he might though, if there was nothing else at the station."

"He'd rather foot it," said Temple. "No, the dog-cart does n't mean the Bishop," and he felt grateful for the respite. He had met the Bishop once, and a repetition of the honour was not welcome.

Then Audley drew up at the gate, and Maurice called his one man of all work to take the horse into the stable.

"Put him up for to-morrow," said Audley, "I'm going to stop the night. Can you give me a shake-down, Maurice?"

"That depends—we do n't know how large a retinue his lordship may bring—if we've only Price we can do it. Have you had lunch? Will you come in, or stay out here and take a weed?" said his brother.

"I'll stay out here. I've had lunch. No, thanks, I do n't want to smoke. Oh, lord! how deliciously quiet you are here!"

"Have you driven all the way from Wearmouth to tell us that? Or have you hurried like this to be in time to see his lordship?" asked Temple Masters.

"No," said Audley; and then he was silent, thinking how he should say what he had come there to tell. It had seemed so easy to make a "clean breast of it" when he had been at Wearmouth, just to resolve to "tell Masters all about it, and ask him to get him out of the mess;" but now he was there, face to face with Masters, how should he begin this very awkward story? He had not seemed to see its awkwardness before, nor so thoroughly to realize how very small a figure he should make in his own narrative. He did n't mind his brother's presence. If Masters was to know, why not he? but how was he to begin telling Masters? Should he plunge into matters

at once by saying he had made a fool of himself. He knew if he did, that Masters would reply that nothing was more probable, and that, to say the least, would be discouraging. How he envied Masters standing there, so cool, so every way master of himself. Had *he* ever got into a scrape? Did he know what one was like? What made him always so ready to get other fellows out of theirs? and how the deuce could he get him out of this if he stood there like an idiot without telling him of it?

Presently Temple Masters looked at him. "If you didn't come here to tell us that Tring is quiet, nor to see his lordship, may we ask what brought you? Was it to stand there pulling to pieces the very few bits of green there are in this desolate part of the kingdom?"

Audley dashed into his subject. "I came to see you."

“Want a father confessor?” said Maurice.
“Sha’n’t I do?”

“You may hear if you like, and help if you can—I’m in a scrape, and I want to get out of it. Masters, there, knows every one’s troubles and has none of his own, lucky dog! I want him to help me out of mine.”

“Is it debt?” said Maurice. “No, you would n’t come to either Masters or me for help in that.”

Audley shook his head. There he stood with his eyes fixed on the ground and his hands in his pockets, stirring the gravel with his foot, much as he had done the sand of the sea shore, looking like anything but a lady’s ideal of a gallant dragoon.

Masters looked at him again, and said, “It’s a petticoat?”

“No, it’s two,” said Audley. Then he had the grace to add, thinking of the “girl as good as gold”—“Heaven forgive me for naming them together.”

Then he told the whole miserable story. If he had been more guilty perhaps he would have been less ashamed than he was. Still, at the best, it was humbling to feel how this plain half-taught girl, his aunt's *protégée*, sprung from a labourer's cottage, had drawn him into her toils—to own that she had proofs of his folly, that he had been weak enough even to say upon paper what it would have been madness to have said even by word of mouth. He had been little more than a schoolboy at the time, and if Clare was of his own age in years, she had been very much his senior in everything else. But there it was ; he had forged his chain, and was now powerless to break it. For years he had been leading a life of deception and meanness, temporising, paltering with a woman he had never loved, and now almost hated, because he did not know how to get quit of her. Quit of her he must get now. There were reasons, imperative reasons, why she must be broken

with, but how was it best to be done? How could it be done without an exposure that would cover him with ridicule?

Temple Masters heard him attentively. "You haven't told me all," he said, when he had done. "I decline to prescribe unless I know the full particulars of the case. What are these reasons?"

"I want to—to settle," said Audley, with a heightened colour.

"Lady fixed upon?"

Audley nodded. "A nice girl,—a girl that will suit me to a T. That his lordship can't object to, young, pretty, and a lady, money of course—you see one must have it on one side or the other."

"And a good girl, of course?"

"Good as gold," said Audley, using his favourite expression. "How else could a fellow introduce her into his family?"

Temple took his cigar out of his mouth and flung the end away—a sure sign that a philippic was in store. When he had

the merest fragment between his fingers, something of amiability lingered about him. With this rejected fragment went every particle of mercy for the forlorn one who had sought his aid.

“I admire you more than I can say,” he began. “The modesty of man! You have led—well, perhaps, a life not very much worse than those of your fellows, but by your own showing not very much better—and you propose to settle down and give the task of converting you into a respectable member of society to the hands of a girl, who, if she is half as good as you say, must be infinitely too good for the task proposed for her. Young, pretty, fresh, pure, to say nothing of the money; and this creature is to have the honour of converting you from the error of your ways, and maintaining you afterwards. . There do n’t seem any scruples on your part. Not the slightest notion that this bargain of yours is a very unfair one for her—not the

slightest hesitation in taking so much and giving so little. Upon my word, when I think of what men are with regard to women, I wonder we are not swept off the face of the earth as not fit to cumber it. I suppose there's scarcely a fellow living but thinks the very dregs of his life, however stale and rank, good enough to offer to the best and purest woman living !”

“I have n't yet come to the dregs of mine,” said Audley, with a little spirit that was a refreshing contrast after his crest-fallen manner but two minutes before. “I want you to help me out of the mess I've got into. Can you, and will you? I don't want a sermon. I know Milly Lisdale is a great deal too good for me—I suppose if we were all to be judged by our deservings there's scarcely a man on earth would find a woman bad enough for him—but I'll make a good husband to Milly, once I'm out of this scrape, and as to her money which you make so much of, why how ever

do you suppose we could get on without it?"

"Well, that's your way of looking at it. I suppose it's what you've been brought up to; it seems in the natural order of things that some men are to be maintained by their wives. If you were a bricklayer or a carpenter, you'd scout such an idea as contemptuously as you would the thought that your wife should have the privilege of getting drunk on Saturday night instead of yourself; being a gentleman there's nothing incongruous in the fact of the lady you choose paying the house-rent and the butcher's bills."

"If she does n't pay them I can't," said Audley, honestly. "I wish my father had made me a bricklayer or a carpenter. I doubt whether I should ever have got into this scrape then."

"Can you help him, Masters?" said Maurice Dale. "I know the girl. You'll have your work to do. She was a live plaything

of my aunt's—a good young woman who was always getting us fellows into scrapes. I think the Bishop was rather partial to her—I do n't think quite enough so to welcome her as a daughter-in-law. I do n't like her myself. I think one especial reason why I hated her was because she was so plain—so very plain, that it seemed as if nature herself must have had a spite against her.”

“How old were you when you committed yourself? I mean when you wrote those letters?” asked Temple Masters; “and how many has she?”

“I never wrote but three in my life. I was eighteen at the time, Masters. I shall be indebted to you for ever, if you'll get them for me.”

“And she's twenty-five; plain, well-educated for her position, and fairly clever.”

“Very cunning—cunning as the devil,” said Maurice Dale. “How ever you came

to keep this from me all these years, young one !” he added, turning with a look of mild pity on his brother.

“Because all these years I’ve known myself a fool and been ashamed to talk about it. No one,” he said passionately, “ever should have known of it if I had n’t been driven to desperation.”

“I wonder what price Miss Clare fixes on these letters,” said Temple Masters, thoughtfully. “They might surely be redeemed by something less than your valuable self. Have you ever offered her any other equivalent for them ?”

“I’ve tried *that* on, and it won’t do,” said Audley. “It would take a heavier sum than I can raise to get those scrawls from Clare.”

“Every man has his price, and according to Walpole, every woman, too,” said Temple Masters ; “but I expect these effusions of yours will have to be bought with something beside the current coin of the realm.

I must see this woman, before I decide upon the price that will buy her over."

"If any one can find her price, Temple, it will be you. If any one can manage her you will," said Audley, eagerly. "I believe if any one can help me out of this infernal scrape and make me a free man it will be yourself. I wonder what instinct it is that makes a sworn old bachelor like you understand women so thoroughly."

"I'll do what I can for you," said Temple. "It's rather a curious affair to manage. If you were in real peril," he added thoughtfully, "I wonder whether you would be so confident in my resources as now."

"I'd trust you with my life, old fellow; it would be in less danger with you than my temper. I wonder what on earth has hindered me coming to you to get me out of this trouble, long before."

"Well, I may as well tell you that you have nothing to dread from this person but

being made the laughing stock of your friends. She has no pull over you, as you were under age at the time; still, she might be likely enough to find some scamp of an attorney who would carry the case into court, unless you came down handsomely to prevent his doing so."

"I'd rather pay anything than have such an exposure," said Audley, ruefully.

"Of course you would, it's never pleasant to own that one's been a fool, however firmly the conviction may be imbedded in one's own mind," said Temple, thoughtfully. "I did n't give you credit for much wisdom, my dear Audley; but I must say you have rather exceeded my expectations in this instance, as to the amount of folly you were capable of in your green and salad days."

He strolled off with a fresh cigar. He had said his say—poured forth what little bitterness was in him, and now was resuming his ordinary amiability. Whenever Temple Masters smoked his better genius

was in the ascendant. Presently he found Maurice by his side.

“You’ll have to buy off this creature,” he said. “I’m as poor as a rat, but I must help Aude. He can’t help himself, you know ; it’s impossible out of his pay and his allowance, and if it ever comes to the Bishop’s ears he’ll cut him off with a shilling. I’ve been long expecting that fate for myself, so it may be half-a-crown between the two of us.”

“Money won’t buy off this woman, and I don’t think I shall find her so easy to manage as Aude thinks for ; she’ll expose him if she can do nothing else. Still something must be done. But I’m afraid from what I gather of her, he’s put his foot more deeply in the mire than he imagines.”

CHAPTER X.

BEATRICE AND MILLICENT.

A LONG, solidly-built stone wall ran round Mrs. Rushington's domain. At one part—that especially appropriated to croquet players—it was lined by a belt of such trees as would best bear the sea air ; but this was in the rear of the house. In front the east winds took care nothing should thrive, and therefore the expanse of grass before the house was only broken by flower-beds, in which geraniums and calceolarias luxuriated for a time, to be renewed each season. To break the dead flat of the wall in the front of the house, Milly had

persuaded her mamma to have a bank raised and turfed, and as this fronted the sea, and was at a sufficient distance from the beach to have some little privacy, the terrace it formed proved a very favourite resting-place of the young lady's when the weather was warm enough to make sitting out of doors enjoyable.

It was a bright warm day, and the villa, with its gay sun-blinds and beds of flowers, lay, a pretty bit of colouring, basking in the sun. It was almost too bright to be English, but now and then, on our best summer days, we do see something of the glory and the beauty of colour even in our climate. The sea was a shining expanse of glass, or molten silver, stretching far and wide in front. The sky was really blue, scarcely a cloudlet of white, even, to soften its brilliancy. It was too warm for walking to be pleasant, so people lay on the beach, or sat on the pier under sunshades or umbrellas, rejoicing in the bit of Indian sum-

mer that had come, when they were only looking for autumn's chill caresses. Altogether it was so enjoyable, so bright, in spite of the heat and the glare, such a treat to revel in warmth, and be glad of the sea breeze when it rose, that Milly Lisdale might well say, as she did to the friend sitting *à la Turque*, close by her on the beach,—

“If it is only half as fine as this to-morrow, I think everything will go off as well as even mamma could wish it.”

Mamma herself was in the distance, reposing luxuriously on a couch in the shade of the verandah. She had a book which interested her greatly. She was an indefatigable novel reader, but Mudie's box, when it came down, was subjected to a strict investigation. Married women might read anything, according to Mrs. Rushington, but for young people's reading some supervision was necessary. Milly took her own way with the novels as she did in most other things ; read what she liked, and submitted

to be lectured if the book was of a class that Mrs. Rushington did not approve of, but read all the same; fortunately her tastes were not much in favour of the more highly-flavoured class of literature, so that it was not very often she was in opposition to her mother. To-day Mrs. Rushington was luxuriating in a novel by Dumas. It was an indulgence she did not often permit herself, but once in a way she practised it, in order, as she said, to keep up her French. There was a slight impropriety about it, which gave it the keener relish, and she was a little uneasy while she read it, and perhaps this very uneasiness made her enjoyment all the greater.

Mrs. Thornton would have read the book without any scruples at all, and very likely have seen no reason why Milly should not read it too. She was not particular in such small matters; but it is doubtful whether she would have enjoyed the book one half as much as Mrs. Rushington did, whose con-

science was troubling her all the time she read it, and who, as she turned a page and began another chapter, looked from it towards Milly and her friend, and said—"Thank goodness, those girls don't seem to want anything but one another."

They did suffice for each other just now. They had plenty to say, that was evident; and if the house, and the red and yellow beds in the foreground, were a pleasant picture, the girls made it all the pleasanter. Milly had a shrewd, sensible little face; perhaps it was a little stretch of good nature to call her pretty, for her features were irregular, and she wanted that brilliancy of colouring which in youth far more than makes up for defective outlines. She was thin, and, indeed, almost angular; tall; and there was the promise of her ripening into a fine woman by and bye, though never into so superb a sultana as her mother made. But she was graceful, and had a good style about her—knew how to dress well and make the most

of her thick dark hair, her white teeth, her clear, if pale, complexion, and whatever good points nature had blessed her with. She was not a beauty, and she knew it, and the knowledge never disquieted her; she liked beauty in other women—was proud even of her mother's—was, if a little self-willed and opinionated—which, perhaps, under the circumstances was rather to be desired than not—thoroughly good-natured and good-tempered, with a bright sunshiny way of making the best of things and people, which in her path through life was likely to be a much greater blessing to her than her money or any amount of beauty could have been; and if Audley Dale had not shown himself hitherto possessed of any great amount of common sense in some matters, he had certainly evinced his discernment when he pronounced Milly Lisdale to be as good as gold.

Her companion was, in every way, a contrast to quiet, sensible Milly. She was bright

all over—the very brightest thing that in that little nook of sunshine, where sea and sand and flowers, and the very houses, were radiant and glowing in the summer light, was to be seen. She was about Milly's age, perhaps a few months the elder ; she was not so tall nor quite so thin ; just as well rounded as a girl of twenty should be without wakening uncomfortable anticipations as to her figure in the future. She revelled in colouring ; her dress and her ribbons looked a clearer white, and a brighter blue on her than they would have done on any other. Her cheeks had such a sweet rose tint, and her eyes such changing lustre in their grey depths. She was not exactly fair, for her skin caught the sun, and now and then freckled or showed the prettiest tint of sunburn in the world. Her hair was neither auburn nor brown, nor golden nor chestnut, but a mixture according to the light of all these shades. Her features were not perfect ; the mouth was a little

too large, and the nose—well, if people liked to be ill-natured, they might be justified in calling it a snub, but it was a much more seductive nose on a woman's face than the purest Grecian or the loftiest Roman. She was fashionably dressed—much more so than Milly, who always toned the fashions down to suit her own style, while this girl followed the mode, let it fleet by as quickly as it would. You might call her, if you pleased, a girl of the period, which, I take it, does not mean such a very bad girl either. She certainly had her faults : she was vain, and liked admiration—peculiarities which no girls but those of the nineteenth century have ever evinced ; she liked dress, and now and then ran to the verge of her allowance ; she would play croquet all day, if there was any one worth playing with, and dance all night if her partners pleased her. She liked novels better than serious reading ; hadn't the slightest turn for science, and

had forgotten every one of the 'ologies which she had been compelled to learn something about at school. On the other hand, she was good-natured to a fault; had more than once gone without a new dress, in order to help a poor pensioner; taught diligently in her Sunday school, and was almost adored by her class; was a very dutiful daughter to a father and mother who spoiled her, and a very good sister to a bevy of urchins of both sexes at home.

Her name must have been given her in a fit of parental inspiration. How else could this imperious, wilful creature—for she was all that—have come to be Beatrice? Or had she grown into the character?—fashioned herself after the name, as some women seem to do? But there she was—just the creature, that, if she had lived three hundred years ago, Shakespeare might have been credited with taking for his ideal of that sweetest piece of perversity he ever drew.

"It will be fine, to-morrow," she said, looking wonderfully weather-wise. "The glass says, set fair, and so does the sky. I'm glad of it. There's nothing I like better than a garden-party, and it would be so vexing when you've caught such a great gun as a bishop, in this part of the world, not to have a sunshiny day for him to go off in."

"Don't say too much about the bishop before mamma," said Milly; "she is so dreadfully afraid that you or I sha'n't behave with due propriety. She's in doubt, too, whether we ought not to ask him to say grace before high tea, and is full of speculation as to whether he will come in his apron."

"I hope he will not make the whole thing slow," said Beatey Layton. "You've almost too many of the clergy, Milly. They're well enough in their way, but I don't like to be overdone with them."

"We can't help ourselves here," said

Milly. "Country society is so limited, and especially the society at Wearmouth. At nearly all our gatherings it's black coats or red, and the black predominate."

"But *rouge gagne*, in this instance, I think," said Beatey. "Milly, haven't you a deeper interest in the Bishop than any speculations as to his apron or the propriety of his saying grace? I should have, I know, if there was a possibility of his being *my* papa-in-law. Good gracious! when one comes to think of it, it must be rather an awful thing to be connected with a Bishop."

There was a little, a very little colour in Milly's face, but she neither averted it nor turned away her eyes. "I suppose it would be no use to pretend I don't understand you, Beatey," she said presently, "for I do; but you are rather premature in this instance; I haven't had the chance of having the Bishop for my papa-in-law offered me as yet."

“Well, I did n’t think you had—but it is to be ; after one sort or another, that chance will be given you. I did n’t suppose you’d had a real, regular offer ; very few men make them now-a-days. I think they hedge, as they call it in racing ; somehow they make themselves understood if we mean to say yes, without giving us a fair opportunity of saying no. No girl can go about now-a-days triumphing in her conquests, like a wild Indianess, with her enemy’s scalps hanging from her girdle. Men have grown wary and cautious, wonderfully cautious, but——”

“Well, but——”

Beatey laughed. “Sometimes we can overmaster their caution, clever as they are. But—*revenons à nos moutons*—to come back, not to the Bishop, but to somebody very near him. Milly, I *do* think you like Mr. Audley Dale.”

“There’s nothing objectionable about him, is there ?”

“Not at all; I’m glad I’ve found it out, though. I shan’t flirt with him now; if you’ve brought him down with your arrow, why should I waste one upon him? I should have flirted with him else; no end——No, he’s not objectionable; indeed I rather like him. He’s good-looking, though I don’t care for good looks in a man; has the manners of a gentleman, I do care for that; and the connection is first-rate, awfully grand! But Milly, if you marry Mr. Audley Dale, you’ll have to be the master; that’s where he would never have suited me, I want some one to govern me. Now, my belief is, whoever marries Mr. Dale will have to govern him.”

“Well?” said Milly, with a quiet smile, that almost admitted the truth of what Beatey had said, and at the same time evinced a sense of her own capabilities for the task. “Is there any great harm in that?”

“Not a bit, if you like doing it, but

I should n't. I like to have my own way dearly, now, but I'd rather give in by-and-bye, and let somebody else have his. One has a right, you see, to be a tyrant beforehand, if it's only to convey a full sense of one's value. But I don't want to be a tyrant always. If ever I find my master, I think I shall be ready to obey him."

"If you had not found your master, Beatey, the idea of the possibility of obedience would never have occurred to you," said Milly, shrewdly.

There was the loveliest deepening of the rose tints on Beatrice Layton's face, the prettiest possible confusion ; then she looked up saucily. "I think I'll tell you. You've been very good, and haven't tried to cheat me in that matter of Audley Dale. That's what I always liked you for when we were at school at Bonn together. If you have a friend you know how to be a friend, and honest and straightforward with her. I do hate little underhand ways ! People

that find out all one's secrets and never tell one any of theirs. Do you remember Laura Rye? A nice scrape I nearly got into through her after you had left school, about an officer that *would* go past the window every day, and two students that sat in the next pew to ours at the English chapel. Fine fuss Madame Weimar made about that. As I told her, it was very hard if they could n't go there to improve their English pronunciation; well, that Laura Rye sneaked about me in the meanest manner. I could n't have thought it. The officer—he was Count something; but there, I can't remember everybody's names. There are such lots of people pay one attention as one goes through life; one had need to keep a list to remember them all. Well, he wrote to me in abominable French, and I showed it to Laura—she, mean thing, told! Would you have believed it? And madame watched me as a cat would a mouse, for the rest of the term. I

answered the letter though ; you see I was bound to do that, if only to let the poor fellow know how very improper it was of him to send it, and I cut Laura dead for ever after, and told her why I did it."

"Well, what has Laura to do with me?"

"Nothing, only that you would n't have acted like her ; you could n't ; you've been a dear now, in this affair ; thoroughly open and candid ; no mincing or pretending you don't care for Audley Dale, when you know all the time you do ; and I'm going to return the confidence. You'll keep the secret—there ! I ought to be ashamed of myself for naming such a thing, but I do think, yes I do, that—that I've met my fate !"

Beatey paused after this announcement, and looked to see if Milly was overpowered, which Milly was not ; she only said, "Who is he?"

"He has a pretty name, at least the first

is ; it's Temple—sounds nice, does n't it ? I do n't like the surname, but the two do very well together. Temple Masters, I've known him, oh ! three years ! and he comes up and down to Richmond, and dines with us sometimes of a Sunday. He's clever, wonderfully, astoundingly clever ! not handsome—but I like his face for all that ; it's just the kind of face for one to see by-and-bye on the bench with a Judge's wig on. Whenever I look at that face, dear, I seem to see that especial wig, and know that it will be there before long. He is n't rich, no one expects that of a barrister, you know, till he's old and grey ; but the money will come, I'm not afraid of that, only I'm not going to let him have his own way altogether about it."

"As to the way he's to get it you mean ?"

"No, but as regards me—I know he cares for me, and he thinks I do n't know it, and does n't mean me to know it till he's

making his way. Goodness knows how long that will be ! Why should n't I know it at once ? I do n't want him to come to me with a bag of money in one hand and his heart in the other. Let him bring me the heart and I'll take it—let him come to me honestly and say he's a poor man, and ask me if I'll have him, and there'll be some credit in my doing so ; there'll be none by and bye, when he's almost coining money. I've set my mind upon conquering him in this. He's so proud, and thinks himself so strong ; let us see who is the strongest ! I have been counting upon to-morrow ever since I heard he was in this part of the world and likely to come. If only the Bishop does n't hinder his being here. Wretched old soul, I'll never forgive him if he does. If only to-morrow is as fine as to-day—I always look my best in sunshiny weather—I think I shall have the glory of seeing him at my feet—metaphorically at least—of course, I do n't expect him to

spoil his trousers by going down in the dust. Oh, Milly! if I only succeed in this I shall be the happiest creature going!"

"That's to say, you mean to get your own way to show how you intend to let him have his."

"It's my turn now, it will be his by and bye. If I conquer now it will be to stoop by and bye. *Any* girl will take a rising man making his thousands a year. I choose to be the exception, and show that I will take him while he's got them to make. At least, well, no—I don't mean him as yet to be quite sure of me, but I do want to be thoroughly sure of him. I want to see which is strongest, the man's pride or his love—there it is—I think that's all about it."

"You mean to lead him on to make an offer, and you're not quite sure whether you'll say yes?"

"That's about it—I shall mean yes, you know—yes, with all my soul, for I do like

him, Milly, but I don't wish him to be too sure of it just yet. I shall have to be humble enough by and bye.

"*You* humble—I should like to see you, Beatey."

"You will see it," said Beatey, with a rueful shake of the head, "but not yet. I think that's the great attraction Temple Masters has for me. That drew me to him at first, set me thinking about him, you know, and wondering whether such a man could ever care for such a girl as I. I did n't wonder long. But let him marry whom he will, he is one of those who will rule—that's why I call him my fate. I assure you I struggled against it at first, but it was no use, I had to give in, one always must give in to fate, but I must have my little victory first. Well, governing must be rather a trouble; I wonder how you'll like it, Milly—that will fall to your share, just as being governed will to mine."

“If I have it to do, I must make the best of it,” said Milly, “and take care that nobody finds it out, not even the subject over whom I rule—there’s a great deal in management.”

“Yes, there is,” said Beatey, and glanced at Mrs. Rushington—the best managed woman in the kingdom, according to her. “I do n’t think Mr. Audley Dale will ever find it out. You won’t mind my saying so, I know, but I don’t think he’s particularly clever—not like Temple Masters, you know; but then the other is n’t nearly so good-looking; it all comes to the same thing. You don’t mind my saying so, do you?” she repeated anxiously.

“Not a bit,” said Milly, “I know it well enough. No, he is n’t clever; no, nor so very handsome, and there’s nothing at all particular about him, but I’ve seen a great deal of him since we’ve been down here, and somehow I’ve got to like him. That’s the plain truth, Beatey, I do like him—I

think I could make him happy and myself happy, too. If I take him, I dare say I shall have to look after a great many things besides just the house, and the servants, but I sha'n't mind that. I was never one to think it such a great thing for a woman to be always on her knees before her husband, I'd rather walk side by side with mine. A man may be very likeable without being a hero or particularly great in anything. Temple Masters may suit you, Beatey ; you were always an ambitious little soul ; but do you know if I were coupled with such a demi-god as you make him out to be, I should feel like the lady to whom some king proposed himself, that he was only a husband fit for state occasions, and that I should like a more common-place mortal for every-day wear."

Mrs. Rushington had come to the end of another chapter, and, looking up, saw the two girls still in animated conversation. All of a sudden it occurred to her that it

might not be strictly proper for them to remain there so long. Some of the officers from the barracks might be passing, or people might leave the Parade and stroll that way. She was certain their heads could be seen above the wall ; she felt alarmed, and beckoned Milly, first secreting her book very carefully.

“Do n’t sit there any longer, my dear child,” she said in her most impressive voice. “It’s hardly the thing—I’m certain you’ll be seen from the other side. Take one of the garden seats where no one, not even with an eye-glass, can see you. Beatrice Layton is n’t quite so careful as she should be in such matters. No wonder ; Mrs. Layton’s ideas are sadly lax as regards young people.”

“Won’t you go in, mamma, yourself ?” said Milly. “Do n’t you find the sun rather warm ? I think it’s always on the front of the house at this time. The morning-room

is a great deal pleasanter—Beatey and I will be in presently.”

Mrs. Rushington rose, gathering her book under her voluminous draperies, and proceeded to the cool, pleasant morning-room at the back of the house. “I want to rest to-day,” she said, “I shall have so much to see to to-morrow. Have you remembered the directions I told you to give cook and Green, Milly?”

“Yes, mamma, and thought of the flowers, and been to the confectioner’s. Do n’t trouble yourself. Everything will go well. Shall I bring you a table for your book? Would you like the blind lowered? There, I think you will do nicely now.”

“And come in, Milly, from the bank. I am sure you can be seen from there, and people always have so much to say. Young girls cannot be too careful. I wonder, when people think of their responsibilities, that they ever wish for daughters. What ever

would have become of you, Milly, if you had had Mrs. Thornton for a mother?"

"Poor thing!" said Milly; and a pity stole into her shrewd little face that softened and made it positively pretty. "I wonder what a child would have done for her?"

"Do n't talk like that, Milly," said her mother, severely. "Providence never sends children to people who can't take care of them? What ever would that woman do with a baby? Now, go, and I'll keep quiet. I declare when I think of to-morrow and the Bishop, and Mrs. Thornton, I feel positively faint. I do hope, now, she won't flirt too outrageously to-morrow—and you won't stop on the bank seat."

"We'll be in, presently, mamma," said Milly, and then went to the bank seat, where she resumed the oriental attitude she, as well as her friend, had before adopted, and remained in it for half-an-hour, by which time the sun was shining so directly down on Beatey and herself

that a retreat into the house was desirable.

“I’ve left mamma pretty comfortable,” she said to Beatey. “She’s got a French novel—‘Doctor Basileus,’ by Dumas. She don’t want me to see it, and would n’t have me read it for the world; and she’s hiding it from me, which would n’t be of very much use, only that I do n’t care for Dumas, and once tried this book, and could n’t get through it at all. I’ve seen to everything for to-morrow. There’s nothing at all for mamma to trouble herself about. But it amuses her to think that she’s overborne with work. The Bishop is almost too much for her, and I think she’s a little afraid of you, Beatey, to say nothing of Mrs. Thornton—poor Mrs. Thornton! who is so blissfully unconscious that she is mamma’s *bête noire*; and I do n’t think, if she did know it, the knowledge would distress her very much.”

CHAPTER XI.

CLARE HAS A LITTLE BUSINESS ON HER
OWN ACCOUNT.

MRS. RUSHINGTON'S garden party was an event in Wearmouth. Her parties were always pleasant. She was a liberal provider, and whether the refectations were suppers, or high or little tea, they were such refectations as might be partaken of with very considerable satisfaction. People were] not very rich in Wearmouth, so that the hospitalities were generally on rather a contracted scale, which made Mrs. Rushington's shine by contrast. Then, too, everybody at her house seemed bound to

look and feel his or her pleasantest. The hostess had the gift of putting people at their ease. It was not what she did, but rather what she did not do. She brought people together, and then left them pretty well to themselves, with the exception of the two or three whom she favoured by permitting their attendance on herself. But she was so genial, so thoroughly happy when looking her best, and with a crowd to admire her, that she seemed a living incarnation of sunshine and geniality.

Mrs. Thornton was looking forward to this garden party with as much eagerness as any one. Not that she cared for garden parties in general; daylight was always trying, and croquet bored her; it was not half so good as dancing; but she had an especial interest in this one. It was to be the first occasion when she should see whether Audley Dale was willing to follow the advice she had given him, and was ready to devote himself to Milly Lisdale. He

was not to devote himself too much. She meant to have a little of his time, herself ; but he was to pay quite sufficient attention to the young lady to let her see what he intended. She took great pains with her dress to-day. It erred a little in being rather overdone. That was Mrs. Thornton's fault, according to Mrs. Rushington, who had only to clothe her superb proportions in the simplest garb, and it looked like a queen's robe. But she looked very well ; a handsome woman, yet, as her glass told her ; and, considering her limited means, likely to be quite as well dressed as any one she would meet at Beechside that day.

Clare assisted at her toilette with her usual assiduity. She was the most respectful of handmaids, and, to all appearance, took as much interest in her mistress's appearance as that lady did herself. Mrs. Thornton surveyed herself in her long cheval glass with some complacency. What a grief it had been to her

husband when she bought that glass. Seven pounds thrown away, that a woman might see herself from head to foot ! She was tolerably satisfied with her appearance ; but her face clouded over a little as, through the thick coil of hair twisted round her head, she saw one silver thread gleaming.

“ Can’t you pull it out, Clare ? ” she said, “ without tumbling my hair ? ” And Clare pulled it out gently. She had wonderful self-control. She hated the woman on whose head she was officiating, intensely, and yet she pulled away that gray hair so gently as not to call forth one expression of pain. “ That will do, Clare. Gray hairs at my age ! ” said Mrs. Thornton, “ My mother didn’t have one when she was forty ! ”

“ Could you spare me for an hour or two this afternoon, ma’am ? ” said Clare, in her softest voice. “ I should be back quite time enough to finish your laces. ”

“ Oh, yes ; go by all means. You do n’t

look well. I think you want a little fresh air ; or is it biliousness ? You *are* bilious, are n't you, Clare ? People with that thick, muddy skin generally are. Yours is such an unhealthy paleness. I often wonder, when I look at you, that you keep so well as you do."

Down stairs Mrs. Thornton went, not thinking a bit that if she had struck her handmaiden with a whip she could scarcely have wounded her more than she had done. She was not a bad mistress ; very good-natured, not too exacting, and fairly liberal. If her servants had been moral pachyderms they might have got on well enough with Mrs. Thornton. She never meant to hurt their feelings, because it never occurred to her that they had any feelings to hurt. Clare she certainly disliked ; but she would not have deliberately annoyed her. She had taught her a pretty sharp lesson, as far as Mr. Audley Dale was concerned ; but it was necessary, and there was an end

of the matter with her. But there was not an end of it with Clare.

Mr. Thornton was waiting for his wife, as was generally the case when they went out together; but for once he was not angry at having to wait. He had been kinder, gentler, more easy to get on with as she phrased it, since yesterday. He was so glad that he had had the courage to speak, as he had spoken, to Audley Dale; so glad that the other had taken his speaking in good part. Every way he was thankful. If the other had really loved his wife, or she had cared for him, would he have given her up so easily? No, not though he could have spoken to him with all the thunders of the law, with all the persuasions of the gospel. If the sin had been, as he had thought it, growing into his soul and mingling with his nature, till it was all one foul corruption, could he have plucked it up at a word, as he had done, and cast it from him? No; he had taken

the foul growth in time, crushed it as soon as it appeared, before it had taken root in the soil. What a blessed thing it was that he had been brave enough and true enough to speak as he had done—blessed for his own peace and household honour—but how much more blessed for the souls that he had, maybe, saved from death!

He must have wronged his wife—judged her too hardly. She was weak and vain, as it was the nature of women to be. He ought sooner to have remembered this, and interposed with his strength between her and the possible destruction he saw coming. Was he not her head, her lord, her guardian? Was it not for him to save her even from herself? Why had he not sooner done that which he had done at last—put one strong arm round her, and held the tempter off with the other? Had he not been too hard upon her for forgetting the duty and the obedience due

to his wishes, and thought too little of the duty he owed her? He had taken care of her at last—poor, weak, plotting creature. She would be safe now, even in despite of her own folly.

He had been dreading this garden party before. He should see his wife at her worst—as he never liked to see her. She would be surrounded by men who would say all the false, deceitful things that women so like to hear. She would show that she was pleased with them, and exult, as a child might with new toys, in all the false homage, the flatteries which she should resent as insults. That would not be all. Audley Dale would be there, hanging over her, making himself conspicuous above others by the attention he paid her. Now—now—this would be just the opportunity for him to put their intercourse on another footing. He might stop away altogether. If he came, he would so comport himself that she must

see the old pernicious familiarity of their intercourse was to be at an end. He would be strange and cold, and let her turn her eyes on him as she might, she would have to learn that never more those eyes would lure him to her side. Some way or another he would let her see that their glamour was past, that the spell was broken, and that she was to him no more than just any other woman. On the whole, he hoped Audley Dale would be there. It would be best for them to meet at once, and for her to realise the change that had come over him. She would suffer a little, but it would be more through her vanity than anything else. He had taken things in time, and as yet she would suffer nothing but through her vanity.

He spoke very kindly to his wife when she came down. She never asked him, as another wife might another husband, how he liked her dress. She knew very well if she had he would have expressed

a thorough disapproval of every article she had on as unfit for the wear of a Christian woman. The little compliments, the kindly flatteries, that make such a pleasant addition to the daily fare of married life, he never paid. A man in the habit of measuring his words, he would have thought such as these vain and light—a sinful waste of speech. Oh! how precious waste sometimes is! Stinted measure is sometimes the worst economy. His wife would not have loved him—it was hardly in her to love any man—but she would have liked him a very great deal better, gone on her way much more pleasantly and happily, if now and then he had told her her dress suited her, or her hat made her look like a girl of eighteen.

But he did his best now—his very kindness was austere and grave, but that he could not help—he told her they had a very fine day, and hoped the heat of the weather would not tire her before they arrived at

Beechside. Then he offered her his arm.—a thing he was still old-fashioned enough to do, but she was not old-fashioned enough to take it, and she walked on by his side wondering what had made him so unusually complacent.

“If he were like any one else, I should say it was the prospect of meeting the Bishop, and that he had an eye to contingencies; but he is n’t like any one but himself in the world. If livings were hanging as thick as blackberries on brambles, he would n’t put out his hand to gather them as long as he thought there was one herring-fisher or boatman would be the better for him at St. Hilda.”

To some extent she understood her husband by this time. She knew that the ambitions of this world, such ambitions as even clergymen the most pious think themselves justified in entertaining, were not for him. He had found his sphere—the one where good work was to be done, where

men were leading hard lives, battling with the ocean for their daily bread, and in the sharp, fierce struggle for existence, all too apt to forget that any other life than this was possible to them. Men so familiarized with death that he lost his awe and majesty, so used to be on the borders of another world that all sense of its terrors had become blunted in them. Men who wanted another voice than that of the ocean in their ears to tell them of Him who made the waves be still—to make even death and danger their teachers, by telling them that after death would come the judgment, and that for hardened, impenitent souls there were greater perils than land or sea could ever know. This was enough for Harold Thornton; his wife saw that she must be content with St. Hilda, and she made up her mind to be content. It was a disappointment; he had talents, if he would only have made a right use of them. But what was the use of all the talents in the

world if people would n't display them? A dozen bishops might come and go, and the Rector of St. Hilda would not know how to profit by their advent. But Mrs. Thornton, by this time, was beginning to be thankful for small mercies. As this particular Bishop *had* come, and the party in his honour was likely to be an unusually brilliant one, it was a very good thing that her husband was in a tolerable temper, and that the storm which but two days before had arisen appeared to have subsided. "He'll behave himself decently, at any rate, to-day," she said; "I suppose he's sense enough to see that he did make himself ridiculous the other night."

Clare waited till her mistress had left the house, and then, without staying to arrange the bedroom, proceeded to make her own toilette. The long grey hair which she had pulled out so dexterously was still around her finger. She looked at it venomously, "I wish it was a snake, for her

sake. She's got many a one besides this, and they show a little plainer in that plait behind than she thinks for. She's old enough to have grey hairs in plenty, whatever she may try and make me believe to the contrary. Never mind, if I've only luck, the luck I ought to have, the luck I deserve to have, I shall turn the tables on her yet, and have some one to pick out *my* grey hairs when they come."

Clare dressed in her own room ; a very neat little place, quite different from poor Deb's untidy sanctum on the other side of the landing. She was exquisitely neat, not only in herself, but in her surroundings. Something of this might be due to Miss Dale's careful training, a great deal more to the innate tendencies of the woman ; and how such tendencies had come, considering Clare's cottage home, and her antecedents for generations, was just one of those problems that might puzzle a psychologist. The dress she put on now was what not

one girl in a thousand, born and reared, and *descended*, mind, as Clare had been, would have chosen. There was nothing in it that the most captious mistress could justly have found fault with, and yet it had the effect of making Clare look very much more unlike a servant, of however superior a class, than any amount of finery would have done. And it was not expensive either—like her mistress, Clare had the knack of making a little money go a long way, but any lady might have worn that dress and felt herself appropriately attired. It was a quiet muslin with a little black silk fichu, a white tulle bonnet with some simple flowers in it, and pale grey gloves. The flowers, gloves, and boots were all good, the sleek black hair was elaborately dressed, and as Clare took a parting glance in her little eight-inch-long looking-glass, she said to herself with a smile of triumph, “No grey there!”

“It isn’t quite time yet,” she added,

“and I do n’t want to be in a hurry. Better him wait for me, than me for him, and he never was one to keep his time too well—I’ll look at his note again.”

She took out an envelope from her pocket, and drawing out the enclosure, read—

“Be on the Denes below Stone’s Point at four o’clock this afternoon.—Thursday.”

That was all—no signature, no date but Thursday, and this note had reached her by the afternoon post, two hours ago—but it was a great deal to Clare.

“It’s his hand, and he wants me. Wants to see me, and has something particular to say, though he won’t tell me that here. He don’t care for me, I’m not such a fool as to think that, but I can do without his liking afterwards, if I can only make him believe he likes me well enough to keep his word. Why should n’t he? I think I’ve got the making of a lady in me—a better one than that cat with her grey hairs. I should not be the first that’s risen, and I’d

make him a good wife, and manage his money better than many would. He'd better keep his word—he'd better," she said, venomously. "I suppose he's beginning to think that now. What I said to him the other night has frightened him, made him feel that I'm not to be played with any longer.

"It's time I was off, now—I don't want to keep him waiting *too* long, he may make it an excuse for going altogether." She took up her parasol and went down. Deb met her in the hall, "You'll be back in good time to iron they laces, Clare—Missis was particular they should be done to-day."

"I'll be back in an hour or two, Deb, go on with your washing;" then she slipped out. "Iron her laces! I wonder how long this will last. Not much longer, if I play my cards well. I should like to see madam's face when I tell her I'm looking for a maid for myself; I'd give Deb the place, but she's too vulgar. I should like a girl with

manners about me, when I have one, but there are so few good servants now-a-days."

On she went, quickly but gracefully. Let Clare move as swiftly as she might, her movements never had the appearance of being hurried. Stone's Point was a lonely part of the Denes not very far from that especial place on the beach where the Rev. Harold Thornton had met Audley Dale the day before. Of all the bare, wide expanse of sand, it was, perhaps, the most solitary part, and Clare supposed that it was for this reason she had been invited there. "They'll miss him at Mrs. Rushington's," she said; "Madam will be staring her eyes out looking for him. She'd be ready to tear out mine if she only knew where he was. He ought to be here. I don't see him; it's too bad of him to be keeping me waiting, and there is not a place to sit down in. There's the sand, but it will spoil my dress, and

when he comes I shall look just like a nurse-girl minding the children. What's that—the point of an umbrella? I'm certain it is, and there's somebody lying underneath it. Had I better go up, or wait here? If there was only a seat! but it's no good standing like a sign-post, and staring at the water, I think I'll go up to him. You're taking it easy, sir!"

And Clare's thin lips were compressed venomously—perhaps it occurred to her that if ever Audley Dale was her legitimate property, she would read him a lesson for taking it thus easily. She could see nothing but the upper portion of an umbrella, which appeared above a long barricade of sand some children had erected as the outworks of a castle which they had not had time to finish building. With that and his umbrella, the figure was pretty well sheltered from the sun, which was now pouring fiercely down on sea and sand. It was the figure of a

man. Clare saw the long trousered limbs stretching lazily on the sand—saw too the flutter of something white, which she concluded justly to be a newspaper, and again she remarked to herself that Mr. Dale was taking it easily. “I’m past my time; so it’s too bad of him. It is not as if he didn’t expect me to be here already. If it was a lady now he was expecting, I guess he’d be on his feet, hat in hand. What a sinful shame it seems I was n’t born a lady! Well, well, I have a pull over him no lady has, and I’ll let him see I know how to use it. I wonder if he’ll have the civility to look this way if I cough, or how long he means to keep me standing here like a stone? Eh—um, eh—um,” and Clare gave utterance to a very tidy little cough, and the umbrella was lowered, the paper dropped, and hat on head instead of in hand, Temple Masters stood before her.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE BISHOP'S SOUL WAS VEXED.

IF the advent of the Bishop of Drowsehead at Mrs. Rushington's garden party had caused no little excitement amongst some of the expected guests, the Bishop himself had been not a little perturbed at the thought of making his appearance there. He had been to such gatherings as a Rector, but he was not partial to them. He didn't play croquet, and he didn't like standing about while other people did so—sometimes the grass was damp; on the driest day he had an instinctive feeling that it was

so, and that the damp would permeate through the soles of his boots, and into the very marrow of his bones ; and it was always too hot or too cold ; if you got in the shade under the trees there were disagreeable things to be met with ; you were obliged to take an interest in matters that you didn't care at all about, and seem amused when all the time you would much rather have been at home with the day's *Times*.

But he thought he ought to go as a matter of civility to a lady who appeared to have been civil to his sons. It was a very good thing for Maurice to have such a house to visit at ; if anything could cure him of the eccentricity of his ways, and incline him to walk in smooth and pleasant paths, it would be knowing ladies of this class, mistresses of pleasant houses, dispensing a graceful hospitality ; for even garden parties were considered graceful by some people ; and, as he had

heard, was the case in this instance, with well endowed daughters to marry.

But there was a difficulty about his getting to Beechside. He had come over from Wearmouth in a fly, which he might have ordered to call for him to-day, but for thinking that there would of course be vehicles suitable for his use to be found at Tring. But there was nothing of the sort—nothing but a chaise cart belonging to the butcher, and the dog-cart in which Audley had driven over from Wearmouth. The Bishop had been a little hurt, the preceding day, at finding neither of his sons at the station to meet him. Maurice, he thought, might surely have borrowed an equipage from one or other of the neighbouring gentry, in which to convey his father to the Rectory. Price, as he mounted on the box of the fly on that occasion and sat beside the driver, felt himself a smaller man than he had ever yet done since his master became a Bishop. But it turned

out that Maurice had not been so much to blame in the matter of the carriage. There was but one family resident in his parish who might be classed under the head of gentry, and he was not on such terms with this one as to justify him in asking them for the loan of their carriage for his father.

Maurice had his horse, certainly, but the Bishop never rode on horseback ; even if he had done so, he would as soon have mounted Maurice's horse as he would one of his hobbies, having misgivings that either would be equally likely to run away with its rider. The chaise-cart was not to be thought of, or else there was no doubt but that the butcher would have lent it. The whole affair then resolved itself into the dog-cart conveying the Bishop into Wearmouth, or into that vehicle being employed to convey some one else into the town to send a more worthy equipage for his lordship. Price was strongly in favour

of the latter. Price was even more fearful of his master's committing himself than his master was. His accommodation had not been quite what he could have wished at the Rectory, owing to Mr. Audley Dale's stopping the night, and there were many things in that bachelor establishment which grieved Mr. Price sorely, as not at all consistent with his lordship's dignity, but if he were to enter Wearmouth in a dog-cart, then Price felt as if his master might as well have remained Rector of Shoreleigh to the end of his days for all the good the bishopric would do him.

The Bishop said they might as well see the dog-cart, and they went to the stables.

"I think it will do," said Maurice.
"After all, who will see you in it?"

Price felt as if he must speak. He could keep silence no longer—but then Price had been twenty years in the Dale family, and on several occasions had assumed the right of uttering his opinion.

“I do n’t think it will do at all,” said Price. “Every one’s eye will turn to his lordship—they knew him the instant he set foot at the station—and is that a thing for him to sit on, or a horse for him to ride behind? ’Tis n’t as if we were still at Shoreleigh,” said Price; “his lordship might, in an emergency, have mounted such a vehicle; but we have left Shoreleigh, and things are different, and I put it to you, Mr. Masters, whether that’s a proper equipage for my lord?”

“I do n’t like the look of the horse,” said the Bishop.

“The horse is as quiet as a lamb,” said Maurice; “quiet, but with splendid action, and a wonderful stepper. I drove out from Wearmouth to St. Ewald’s last week with him—Grey lent him to me—twenty miles; did it in less than two hours; back to Wearmouth the same night. I had to attend a meeting in favour of the Ballot, a working men’s demonstration; I dare say

you've seen something of it, sir, in the papers?"

"Yes, I've seen it," said the Bishop sadly. It would have been hard if he had not. A great yellow placard, announcing, among other names, that the Rev. Maurice Dale would address the meeting, had been the first thing that attracted his eyes at the station, painfully confirming what the morning's *Times* had told him.

"We've seen it, sir," said Price, solemnly. Maurice had always been the black sheep of the family, and even Price felt that he had a right at times to lift up his voice, and convey at least indirect reproof by its tones. Indeed Price was privileged. The Bishop would hardly have known how to sustain his new state without Price to help him bear the burthen. He had a habit of looking and appealing to him in minor matters, which had grown upon him since his sister's death. He had looked to her a great deal—if his wife had lived, he would

have been morally dependent upon her. He wanted a walking-stick, he was a man who could not get on at all alone, and Price had come to be regarded as this walking-stick ; and, to do Price justice, however necessary he might be to his master, he did not plume himself at all unduly upon such necessity.

Master and man, if one may speak so of a bishop and his confidential attendant, were a contrast in appearance. The Bishop was tall, angular, and, if it had not been for something of inherent weakness pervading his whole appearance, would have been dignified. He had a benevolent, bland look about him which was very becoming to a bishop ; he really was good-natured to such an extent that, if it had not been for his elder daughter and Price, he would have been woefully imposed upon. His hair was gray, his features regular, and his complexion pale—altogether, he had just the appearance of a bishop. Nature, at any

rate, had fitted him externally for the post.

Price felt that—felt, too, that he was not outwardly adapted for a bishop's servitor. He was rotund and florid, and short—his personal appearance had never troubled him while he only waited on a rector, but it was a trouble to him now. Price did the best he could, dressed himself as carefully as he did his master, his broad-cloth was almost good enough for a dean, his general get-up was unapproachable. Price dressed as a matter of conscience; it was the least he could do when Nature had been so niggardly towards him.

“We’ve seen it, sir,” said Price, looking severely at Maurice. In *his* side that eccentric young cleric was a sorer thorn even than in his master’s. Then Price looked at the dog-cart, and shook his head; and the Bishop looked at Price, and made up his mind not to adopt that low vehicle.

“I had better stop here,” he said, “than

enter the town in so unsuitable a manner. Some arrangements, however, must be made against next Sunday. Could not Sir Thomas Brewster oblige me? Surely he must have a carriage which he might place at my disposal?"

"He has half-a-dozen," said Maurice, "but I should n't like to ask him for one. He and I don't quite hit it together, and I should n't like to be under an obligation to him."

"Tithes?" said the Bishop. Once, in his rectorial life, he had had a dispute with the great landowner of his parish. It referred to tithes, and the Rector, who was perfectly in the right, had, with unusual pertinacity for him, stood on his right. He had got the better in the matter, and the doing so had involved some considerable pecuniary advantage, but still he had always felt that the result was hardly worth the unpleasantness it had cost. A clergyman ought to be on good terms with

the Squire of his parish, and quarrelling, to say nothing else, was undignified and ungentlemanly. "I would avoid any unpleasantness about money matters, if possible," he said.

"No, it isn't the tithes—I've nothing to complain of there—but it's his new dog-kennels and stables——"

"Well?" said the Bishop.

"He asked my opinion about them, and I told him frankly, the money would be better spent in a score or so of decent cottages. It struck me, as it was, that his dogs and his horses were much better housed than many of my parishioners. Sir Thomas took offence; none was meant, but, you know, if one's asked one's opinion, one's bound to give it. Then we'd another little difference. He sent a small boy in my school to jail for helping himself to a turnip, damages one farthing, costs five shillings. I was out of the way when he did it. When I came back, I had the

mother at me. Of course I paid, and fetched the child away from Wearmouth. Sir Thomas didn't like it. I'm afraid I *did* express my mind with unnecessary plainness to the clerk of the justices. And then we have had one or two little disputes about poachers. He preserves very strictly, and, somehow, some of my people do n't quite like it—neither do I. As I told him, the game laws were the worst relics of feudalism we had left; Sir Thomas was offended, and we have n't spoken since."

"Of course you have n't. How could you expect anything else? How should I have got on in Shoreleigh as I did if I had meddled with matters so completely beside my vocation? I thought you would be safe here," said the Bishop, mournfully. "You've only one landed proprietor in the place, and you've managed to quarrel with him. I had a dozen, including the large farmers in Shoreleigh, and I never but once had a difference with any. Why

can't you leave these matters to those whom they concern? Now, I suppose Sir Thomas will not think it incumbent upon him to call on me?"

"I do n't suppose he will, but I thought these matters, being in my parish, concerned me. But about the dog-cart, sir? Can you trust yourself in it, or must we get you another conveyance from Wearmouth? I'd ride over at once and secure one, but I'm booked for Shotsham. There's a meeting there to-night, in favour of the disestablishment of the Irish Church. I am so sorry to leave you, but I've promised to attend. I believe they expect me to speak; but Masters here is going into Wearmouth to-morrow. If you really think you can't trust yourself behind Stamper he'll do his best for you."

"Good heavens!" cried the Bishop. "Did I ever attend a public meeting in my life?—and for such a cause? If I *must* go to Wearmouth—and really I shall

hardly care to show myself amongst the people—let me have some conveyance that will not utterly disgrace my office. Mr. Masters, may I trouble you to see to that for me?"

"With two horses, please, sir," interposed Price. "His lordship ought not to enter that town with less than two."

"I'll see to it, my lord, with pleasure," said Temple Masters. "Lend me your nag early to-morrow, Maurice. I want as long a day as I can have before we are due at Beechside. Please, Audley, come this way, and give me some further instructions about the commission I'm to execute for you."

And the commission which Temple Masters was to execute was the errand which had brought him on the Denes to-day, and caused him now to stand face to face with Charlotte Clare, instead of the younger and more pliable gentleman whom she had expected to meet there.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BATTLE ON THE DENES.

CHARLOTTE CLARE was a clever woman, and the moment she saw Temple Masters she felt that some danger to her well-laid scheme for raising herself in the social scale was at hand. She never flinched. "Let them try their worst," she said to herself; "and they'll find me equal to them." She looked at Mr. Temple Masters as if she had never seen him in her life before, though she perfectly remembered him as a visitor to the Rectory at Shoreleigh, on one occasion, and had since seen him at Wearmouth, in company

with Audley Dale. He was there instead of his friend, that was clear, and it was also clear that his being there boded no good to Charlotte Clare. She looked him full in the face, with the blank, vacant look of a mere stranger, and made as though she would have passed on ; but Temple interposed. He took his cigar out of his mouth, and threw it away, then touching his hat, slightly, said " Miss Clare, I presume ?"

She understood the tone. It was not that in which he would have addressed his equal ; but neither was it that in which he would have spoken to an ordinary serving-woman ; her dress and manner made an impression on him. As indeed they had.

" Very well got up," said Temple Masters to himself. " Decidedly plain, but, given favourable circumstances, has the making of a lady in her. She does n't care for that simpleton, Audley—I should say a woman with those eyes never cared for any one but herself—which will make my task all the

easier. I need have no compunctions about blighted hopes and innocence betrayed. In this case I should doubt whether there has ever been any innocence to betray. My dear Audley, looking at this woman, I don't wonder that she was too much for your inexperience, despite her green eyes and the traces of the small-pox."

"He's clever," said Clare, looking at him. "And he's a lawyer, and they say is to do great things. Oh, that wretch! That mean, cowardly skunk, Audley, to set him upon me!" Clare never *spoke* strong language, unless when intensely excited, and sure of privacy; but she generally thought it. Her refinement was so sheerly superficial that to *think*, as she would not have spoken for the world, was an immense relief to her. She faced Temple Masters now, and said in her demurest tone, "My name is Charlotte Clare, sir." He knew all about her, so it was no use pretending to be any better than she was, and taking

the "miss" as a matter of course. "But you have the advantage of me."

"I am a friend of Mr. Audley Dale's. I think you know him. I am here on his behalf. Possibly it was him you expected to meet on the Denes this afternoon?"

"If Mr. Audley Dale had been a gentleman, he would have come," said Clare, viciously. "Leading me to believe that he would be here, and then sending some one else in his place. If he is n't ashamed of showing himself——"

"No, he is n't ashamed, nothing of the sort, but he has an engagement, as perhaps you know, at Beechside; and, besides, he thought it better to let me see you. Mr. Audley Dale has done some foolish things in his time, as perhaps you are aware—some *very* foolish things when he was a boy at Addiscombe."

He was watching her intently—just as he might have watched a witness in the box, in whose talents he had every con-

fidence, and in whose veracity none. Temple Masters was a fluent speaker, and knew how to attack the weak points of a jury ; but if ever he won his way to wealth and position, it would be far more by those keen, eager eyes of his, and the still soul keeping watch behind them, than by any flight of eloquence. He was taking the woman's measure, and already he had pretty nearly gauged it. It would be difficult to grapple with her. Audley Dale was deeper in the mire than he thought for. This was no common village girl, who might be easily bought or frightened off. If this woman thought she had a hold, she would keep it to the death. He warmed to his work. The difficulty of it cheered him on.

“ I don't know what foolish things you mean,” she said, presently. “ Whatever he did at Addiscombe, he was old enough to know what he was about. If a gentleman gives his word to a poor girl—a *good*

girl, too, sir—who might defy the whole world to say a word against her—I take it he is bound to keep to his promise, and not to fling her off because he thinks a lady with a little money might suit him better. I do n't know whether Mr. Audley Dale has ever acted foolishly ; but if this is what he thinks of doing, I am sure he is acting wickedly now."

"Uncommonly well done, by Jove!" thought Temple Masters. "Mildly heroic, and do n't carry it too far. Good! I'd swear you were *good*, you jade! and you'd sell your so-called *goodness* just as sordidly and basely as any lost creature in the streets would barter her vileness: only you'd make a better bargain. *You* want a wedding-ring and a position. She, poor wretch, wants a crust and a glass of gin. *Good!* Why there is n't fire enough in you to go astray!"

Then he said aloud, "Do n't you think all this is a little beside the question.

We're not talking of Mr. Audley Dale's marrying any one—young men of three or four-and-twenty are not in such a hurry to enter into matrimony as boys of eighteen. They know too well all that the doing so involves. There are so many unpleasant responsibilities, and if they marry, in a conventional sense of the word, beneath them, so many unpleasant consequences, consequences which are not confined to the man, but fall very much more heavily on the partner of his indiscretion."

"I'm ready to face such consequences, sir," said Clare. "It's of no use pretending to misunderstand you. We may as well be clear and open. I have considered myself for some years past, and with good reason, engaged to Mr. Audley Dale. I've letters in his handwriting proposing marriage; other letters saying that it should take place when he was of age. What have I done to him that he should not keep his

word ? I've been true to him every way—let my time go by when I might have married others, and well married, too, and done all I could to make myself fit for the position he could raise me to. I should make a better lady than many born to it. I should n't bring him a fortune, but I'd save him one. I'd take my chance of other unpleasantnesses, I should live them down ; and when once a woman marries, she's her husband's equal, people would forget before long that I was n't so till he made me. As to his family, well, they'd get over it in time, as many a family has got over such a thing before."

"Fairly put. It might all be as you say, if Mr. Dale were still in the same mind that he was some years ago. But he is not. A man sees with different eyes to a boy's—I'm not going to urge anything in favour of his inconstancy—I only admit the fact. We must make the best of the fact—it can't be altered, but to some extent it can be

atoned for. If any reasonable compensation——”

“A jury would give me five thousand pounds,” said Clare.

“I doubt that, and you would n’t get it if they did. Audley Dale is a poor man, worth nothing but his pay and a small allowance from his father. The Bishop is a most exemplary man—but there, you know him, and I need n’t expatiate on his good qualities to you ; but knowing him as you do, you can judge whether he would feel himself called upon to pay such a debt as this ; whether he would not feel himself as fully justified in refusing to do it, as he would a debt incurred at the gaming table, or on the race course.”

“There would be the disgrace,” hissed Clare, and her eyes shone with an evil light, and her sallow cheeks were lit up—she had more fire in her after all than Temple Masters had given her credit for.

“Mr. Audley would be punished as he deserves to be.”

“I do n't think the disgrace would affect him as much as you imagine. Men, even juries, look at these matters in a different light to what women do. You are a year Audley Dale's senior, when you were both in your teens that year made a great difference. Perhaps you threw yourself in his way—made the most of your opportunities—led him on—played with him—as *good* women like yourself know so very well how to play and to lead. He was fool enough to write those letters—but—he is *not* fool enough to abide by them. He did a rash thing as a boy, he will not do a mad one as a man. He will not ask his family to welcome, his equals to receive, a woman who tries to hold him by a tie which he loathes, which he is ashamed of himself for having forged; a woman greatly beneath him in birth, in education, and who proves by thus persistently forcing herself upon

him how greatly she is beneath him in honourable feeling and self-respect. I think that's the way a jury would have looked at it had he been of age when he wrote the letters. In that case they might have given damages, but they would only have been nominal ones, while, as it is, he would only have to put in a plea of infancy and there would be an end of the matter. If it came before the public, of course he would be laughed at a little, and the Bishop would be pitied. Neither the laughter nor the pity would hurt either of them very much, and I do n't suppose a single lady in the kingdom would think herself justified in refusing Audley Dale because he did not choose to put his late aunt's waiting-maid on a footing of equality with his sisters."

"You can talk, sir, it's your business," said Clare, coldly. Her colour had subsided, and the green stillness of her eyes was as placid as ever. "But other lawyers can

talk too, and there are two sides to every question."

"So there are, I admit it; but I think we should have the best side in this. Still there is no need to bring matters to such a point as we have been speaking of. Mr. Dale considers that you may have some right to feel aggrieved. Perhaps you had no right to form the expectations which you did, but still you have formed them. It is possible that, as you say, you may have let other chances of establishing yourself go by. It is not yet too late for you to do so, especially if a small dowry were in the way. He is not rich, but still, as reparation for any unintentional wrong he may have committed, he would do his best for you. I need hardly say, that in such a case he would expect his letters returned to him."

"You need hardly have said it," said Clare, looking at him now with her pale face of a livid whiteness. "I expected that was coming, all along. Will you tell

Mr. Audley Dale from me that I have n't changed if he has, that I am still in the same mind I was when he wrote those letters, and by what they say and the promise he gave me then I'll stand ; if he's wise he'll do so too. I'm not to be bought off ; if I had been a lady you would n't have dared to try it on. Women like me are made only to be trodden on and played with. Let Mr. Audley Dale do it if he dares !”

“Dangerous !” said Temple Masters to himself. “There'll be mischief here if we do n't mind. She's at white heat now, she may be a little wiser when she cools, but I doubt it.” To her he said, “You may think better of this by and bye. I think, if you turn the matter over, you will agree with me that the course I have suggested is the best for yourself as well as for Mr. Dale. I won't urge it on you now ; if you think anything further of it, let me know. Any letters directed to Temple Masters at the

Rectory, Tring, will be sure to find me, whether I am there or not. Good afternoon. I don't pretend to say that my interest in you is great enough for me to advise you sheerly for your own sake. But if I did look at it from your side of the question I do n't know that I could advise you to a better course. I hope no womanish temper will prevent your taking it. I should give you credit for more wisdom than that. Good afternoon—you'll remember—Temple Masters."

She returned his parting salutation. He was obliged to own that even Milly Lisdale or Beatey Layton could hardly have done it better. But she muttered to herself as she did so, "When I *do* write, Mr. Temple Masters, it won't be to tell you I've taken your liberal offer. You're clever, and if I wanted a lawyer on my side I do n't know that I could choose a better. But there are others as clever as you ; and such letters as Mr. Dale's are worth a little more than

you want to make me believe. But it is n't the money that they'll fetch. I'll keep them for——I'll keep them to punish and humble the man who thinks he can fling me off like an old glove. Oh, Lord! if I had loved him what should I be bearing now! He comes to the house, and bends over that woman—lets her look in his eyes, and whisper nonsense to him, and thinks I can come in and out, and see it all unmoved. Can I? You should know a little better what I'm made of, Audley Dale! Then there's a talk of him and Miss Lisdale. There may be some truth in it. She has money, and as he can't marry Mrs. Thornton, she may not so much mind his marrying some one else. It will be a good blind, and Miss Lisdale will be easily managed—a little more easily managed than me. Let them go on—let them go on. I've waited very long. I'll wait a little longer.

“Now I'll go home and think matters over

—think how I shall best punish that mean ! cowardly ! false ! vile ! WRETCH !!!” She said the last words rather than thought them. They came hissing out between her teeth ; and their utterance, though very low, was a relief to her.

Another woman would have found vent for such a storm of passion as was raging within her in hysterical shrieks or tears. But Clare did nothing of the kind. That was never her way. The tears or hysteria would have involved an expression of impotence, which would have been humbling even to herself—the words seemed like so many daggers, and symbolised the thrusts she hoped to inflict in retribution. She repeated these with several more, and then walked quickly home—swiftly and gracefully ; and stolid Deb, on her return, did not see that anything was amiss ; neither would a much quicker-witted person than Deb have thought that anything was wrong, beyond the headache

of which Clare complained, as she asked Deb to get her some tea.

“And then see that there’s a nice, bright fire, and put the irons down. I’ve got those laces to do,” she said. She had always a habit of ordering Deb about, and causing her to feel very much the inferior of the two. And as she went upstairs to take off her walking dress she murmured to herself, “Don’t I wish they were like that shirt I’ve read of somewhere; and would eat into madam’s flesh, till they’d poisoned it like a cancer !”

If hell is within us, and wherever we go, brought about by our own sinful and unruly hearts—if for each mortal his own passions make his own pandemonium, even in this world, without waiting for entrance into another, then Charlotte Clare was already experiencing as much torture as any lost soul can be supposed to know. And yet she smoothed out her gloves, and put her dress and bonnet away as carefully

as if she had come from a common-place tryst, where all had gone off smoothly and pleasantly; and she drank her tea, and ironed the laces afterwards, as composedly as if the wish that she had uttered respecting them had not come from the very bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT BEFELL AT BEECHSIDE.

TEMPLE MASTERS was more successful in his quest for a carriage than he had been in his mission to Charlotte Clare. In good time an equipage, duly appointed with two horses, and, considering it was a hired affair, looking not so unfit for a bishop, arrived at the Rectory gate at Tring. Even Price was satisfied with it, and having surveyed it carefully, returned to assist his master in his toilet, and give him a favourable report of the equipage. So far the Bishop was satisfied. He should enter Wearmouth as a bishop ought to enter it ;

but he was still in doubt as to whether or not he should wear his apron. He was as much puzzled as a lady sometimes is as to whether full dress or demi-toilette will be the most suitable attire for any special occasion. He rather inclined to the apron, especially as Price was decidedly in favour of it. But then, if Price could have had his way, his lordship would have gone about with a mitre for every-day wear, and taken his apron to bed with him. He should meet a number of the local clergy at Beechside—for, if the clerical element had been excluded from the society of the place, the society would have been very limited indeed. The Bishop wished to impress, but not to overawe. He had no doubt but that as a bishop he was a very formidable person, indeed, in their eyes. He remembered the days, such a little while back, when a bishop had ranked next to a crowned head in his own. Would not the apron be too palpable a proof of his

superiority? Something that had better be laid aside in ordinary life, just as a sovereign might lay aside the insignia of his state? On the other hand, ought he not to wear such insignia—to keep the burthen of his exalted position, however much he might be inclined to lay it aside? Price seemed to think so. On the whole he would be guided by Price and wear the apron. It was an age of laxity and irreverence, not at all a time for those who honoured their order to lay aside the outward symbols of it. He would stand by the apron, as he would by anything else characteristic of his cloth.

Price had resolved to accompany his master. Of course he did not wear livery; but as only the driver had come with the brougham sent for the Bishop, Price considered that his presence on the box would be better than that of no second servant at all. “I shall be handy to open the door, when your lordship

alights, and clear the way, in case of any crowding. No doubt but people will be curious to see your lordship when you do them the honour of visiting their town."

Now and then the Bishop wished that Price would forget he was a lord ecclesiastical. He was for ever reminding him of his own dignity, till sometimes the remembrance of it became wearisome; indeed the dignity itself had not been of his seeking. He had not achieved greatness, it had been thrust upon him; and sometimes he wished it had not been so thrust. He had been a happier man in that Westshire Rectory, to which his great relations now and then sent their younger branches for change of air, or as a beneficial relaxation after a hard-working session. The shadow of his family dignity had rested on him pleasantly, giving him a mild reflected splendour which had been easy to bear, and had added not disagreeably to his social importance. But it had entailed no re-

sponsibility upon him—no more, that is, than he was very well able to sustain. His income was equal to it. It would not have been pleasant to have been poor. As a Dale, cousin to Lord Carlyon, of course it was only proper that he should live in rather better style than did other rectors and vicars—keep a carriage and pair and maintain a good table—be liberal, too, in his benefactions of soup and blankets, and contribute handsomely to his parish schools. All this he had done, and never felt the doing it weigh heavily upon him. He had lived upon pleasant terms with his neighbours—old-world country squires, with their Toryism in the fashion of a hundred years back. He had sat on the bench and been guided by the wisdom of the clerk, let his fellow magistrates have their own way in the matter of poachers, and been liberal of doles to the wives and children of those they sent to prison—done his best, with the most good-natured intentions in

the world, to pauperise his parish and verify the Scripture—"The poor shall ye always have with you." Life had been pleasant enough in this little nook, where the world had gone by and taken no notice of him—where his light had twinkled in a corner, and nobody had taken heed whether it burnt more or less brightly—much pleasanter, he was afraid, than it was likely to go on in Drowsehead, where people were scrutinizing his every movement and saying, and expecting all sorts [of things from him, the least of which would be a heavy tax on his capabilities.

Still, as far as he knew how, he would do what was expected of him. He was going to do it now. A bishop should mix in society, and unbend, and be pleasant with his clergy, and kind and genial to ladies; he was going to be all that, but at the same time wear the apron, and let them see that he had not forgotten his bishopric. Down he came, full of this resolve, and

turned into the rectory drawing-room—a little low dark room, with the furniture in it of the previous occupant, and looking as cheerless and unlovely as a bachelor's drawing-room generally does look. His two sons were there; they had been looking out of the window while waiting, and exchanging observations on the hired brougham and the borrowed dog-cart. They were tired of waiting now, and Audley was drumming his fingers on the glass, and Maurice whistling—was it, “Sally come up?”

The Bishop did n't like it; he never approved of whistling—a habit in which Maurice persistently delighted; it was unclerical, to say the least, and Maurice might have been better employed than in standing there whistling and looking out of window instead of attiring himself to accompany his father. He was dressed in a morning costume that was the facsimile of Audley's. The Bishop could have sworn—that is, supposing a bishop could swear

about anything—that they were made by the same tailor. A morning-coat, grey trousers, and a black neck-tie. He always would wear black neck-ties—the bishop and he had had several arguments on this very matter, but he had not expected that he would wear one on an occasion like this, when the Bishop was to make almost a public entrance into the society of Wearmouth. He stood there calmly and leisurely, and looked at the Bishop, not with any impertinence, but still as a son might look at a father who had kept him waiting, and said, “If you are quite ready, sir, perhaps we had better start.”

Then he really meant to go in that dress—in that morning-coat, those grey trousers, and that black neck-tie—the very dress of his brother, who was a lieutenant of horse. There was not the slightest thing about him to show his cloth, and the Bishop himself, from the time he was ordained a curate, would almost as soon have thought of put-

ting a hempen rope round his throat as anything but a white neck-tie. He said something to that effect to his son, who made answer, "I do n't want to show the shop wherever I go, sir, any more than Aude here. We do n't care to be always in uniform—it's getting to be almost as low for one in our line as in his."

"I wish you would avoid slang and such expressions as you have just used," said his father. "Did you ever hear anything but good English when at home?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders, and looked slightly sorry. "It's a villainous habit, I know, but every one does it. You should hear Hartley?"

"Who is he? If he is so versed in slang I should hardly care to hear him."

"Rector of Wye, four miles from here. I'd back him against any public school boy. If we want to know the last new colloquialism, we have only to listen to him."

He made a first-rate speech last night at the meeting."

"Mr. Hartley was there, too?" said the Bishop, with half a groan.

"Well, yes, he rather goes in for that kind of thing. You see, when a parish is so small, what is a man to do? It does n't fill up his time nor his thoughts—one can't be always pottering about with the old women, poor old sinners! and if you have n't a soul in your parish that you can exchange a rational idea with, you must find some means of filling up the time. If one was in a town, now,—but there, I do n't know," said Maurice Dale, a little mournfully, "that Hartley and I should get on any better if we were."

"I do n't know that you would," said the Bishop, as severely as he knew how. "The more contracted the sphere in which a dangerous example manifests itself the better. I should say Mr. Hartley and you would certainly both be better in the seclusion of a village."

"'T is n't that," said Maurice, still looking on the ground—a habit he had when speaking of his clerical duties; "but I don't know that either Hartley or I do our work so particularly well that we need want more of it. But had n't we better be off, sir? Mrs. Rushington will begin to think she is not to have the pleasure of seeing you?"

"The brougham will take us all," said the Bishop; "what need is there to have that dangerous-looking dog-cart out at all?"

"I must drive it back," said Audley. "The fellow who lent it me expects it at his quarters to-day. Maurice was coming with me. A close carriage always makes his head ache."

"Drive in to Wearmouth in—that—thing?" said the Bishop with a pause between every word, and looking aghast at his elder son.

"I've often done it, sir, or driven it else-

where,—at least, whenever I could borrow it of the fellow that owns it, and I shall be fit for nothing if I go inside this warm day. I must beg that you will excuse me.”

What else could the Bishop do? He got into the brougham, and there he sat in solitary state, with Price on the box, while his two sons followed him. It had been a planned thing that they should do so. One or other ought to have travelled with their father, but both shrank from it.

“I shall never hear the last of that meeting, last night, if I do,” said Maurice. “He has come over here on purpose to give me a lecture as to my ways, and I don’t mean to give him the chance if I can help it. If I’m shut up with him I’m at his mercy, and he’ll show none. It’s very hard—I’m doing the best I can after my own way—why can’t he let me alone in it.”

Audley would have gone with his father, but just then he was in no humour for a *tête-à-tête*. He had made up his mind

about Milly Lisdale, but till he was quite sure how she had made up hers he did not want to say anything to the Bishop about her. And by two or three words that the Bishop had dropped, and a little curiosity he had shown about Miss Lisdale, it had seemed very probable to Audley that he might be subject to cross-questioning when alone in the carriage with his father, which cross-questioning he was especially anxious to avoid. So the Bishop drove into the town in solitary state, and his sons followed him, and he was received by Mrs. Rushington with all the honours she knew how to pay.

She was just a little afraid of him. Her continental experiences had, not brought her across many bishops, and she had lived, if not a fast life, at least a very easy one. With the clergy of Wearmouth, who formed so leading a feature in its society, she got on well enough, but then, with the exception of Mr. Thornton, the clerical world

took matters comfortably, and Mrs. Rushington felt that for any little derelictions from the strict line of Puritanic propriety she had little to fear from them. But a bishop was another matter ; and this bishop was new, and nobody had ever heard anything of him before he came to his see. He might be the strictest of the strict—Evangelical enough to look upon theatres as a delusion of the evil one, and dancing as a sport fit only for the arch fiend. Very likely he was strict—if he had been Broad or High, people would have heard of him ; now-a-days it was only the Low Church that went on its way quietly, and never made itself conspicuous at all unless by being more disagreeable than other people to its neighbours.

She had scolded her husband, and lectured Milly and Beatey as to their proper behaviour. She was full of fears lest Mrs. Thornton should misbehave herself in one way or another. “That woman makes

such dreadful play with her eyes, and always when other people are looking," said Mrs. Rushington to herself.

It was late when the Bishop came, owing to that little dispute about Maurice's toilet, and nearly every guest had arrived. Mrs. Thornton was there, looking as well as she ever did look by daylight; she was flushed and animated. Here was an opportunity for display, and, poor thing! how she enjoyed it. Her life was so cold and straight—she had compared it herself once to a long narrow walk between two high walls, and, lo! here was an outlet into something fresh and bright, a glimpse of a world where other things were talked of than Bible societies, Sunday schools, and clothing clubs. The people she met here, being so many of them more or less connected with the Church, did necessarily talk of such things, but they were not always before their eyes, as her husband would have had them or similar

matters before hers—they had met to spend a few pleasant hours together—to pay compliments, say pleasant things, and look and seem their best. How nice it all was! how pleasant the sunshine and the flowers; not that she cared so very much for flowers, unless in a well made-up bouquet; and the pretty dresses—next to being well dressed herself, Mrs. Thornton liked to see other people so. What a blessed relief it all was from that dull Rectory parlour, with its hideous paper, and its dreary look-out on the churchyard and its graves!

She looked keenly at the Bishop, and was not half so much afraid of him as Mrs. Rushington was. “He’s a good old soul,” she said, “and I should say would make a capital papa-in-law.” Then Audley Dale came up to her, but she put him off; “Go and speak to Miss Lisdale first, sir; then if you like, come back and tell me how you’ve prospered.”

Her husband saw him come and go, and felt more satisfied than ever that he had spoken as he had. He had evidently only come to his wife out of sheer politeness, because it would look strange if he did not, and for nothing more. Thank heaven ! he had put a stop to that folly ; it was over and done with ; he might breathe like a free man ; free at last from the awful dread that had been hanging over him.

Milly Lisdale and Beatey Layton were together. Milly was looking very charming in her quiet little way. Beatey was a blaze of prettiness ; a little disquieted too, under all her colouring and brightness. What did Temple Masters mean by not making his appearance ? Was he afraid to come—afraid to venture near her, or was he staying away out of sheer indifference ? Milly read her friend's trouble, and put an end to it as soon as she

well could. "Haven't you brought Mr. Masters with you?" she said, as she shook hands with Audley. "There's no one like him for croquet. We shall all be disappointed if we do n't see him."

"He will be here soon," said Audley. "He is a busy man, as you know, and even down here, can't always call his time his own."

He felt ashamed of himself as he made the excuse. Ashamed to think what it was that was detaining Temple. Many a far worse man would not have felt half so humbled as did Audley Dale when he reflected upon the position into which he had brought himself. He was more in love with Milly Lisdale than he was aware of, himself—more thoroughly in earnest in the whole matter than he had given himself credit for being in anything, or he never would have looked with the loathing that he did on the woman who had trammelled him, with the scorn that he

did on himself for being so trammelled. What right had he—fool and idiot—who had done his best to make shipwreck of his life at its very outset, to offer himself to this girl with her unsullied life. her innocent thoughts, with all her past lying so clear and open that there was not a day of it that she would fear to speak of—not an action that the whole world might not know of.

What did Temple Masters mean when he said that any man thought the dregs of his life good enough to offer to any woman? Had he, Audley Dale, only the dregs of his to offer to the girl before him? Heaven forbid! He had not come to that yet. Weak he had been, perhaps weaker as a man, in that he had not in one way or another wrenched apart the chains which had bound him, than as a boy in forging them. Idle, thoughtless, selfish, vain—thinking that it was not too much to ask a woman for her all and give her back

that which would cost him next to nothing. But after all, there was something more than the dregs of his life yet left for him to give ; if only the very best that he had to offer would be thought by Milly Lisdale worth her while to take.

He was getting a little afraid of that now—a little more fearful of himself, a little more in awe of her. He had said she was as good as gold—was not gold too good for him ?

Beatey Layton brightened up internally after his explanation, such as it was, about Temple Masters. Externally she had been all radiance—then she thought, as he had made her feel so very much the happier, she would do him a good turn in recompense for the one he had unintentionally done her, and run off and leave him alone with Milly. “I do n’t know whether he has anything to say to her, or whether he has n’t, but I may just as well give him a chance,” she thought. People were calling her, so that she had a good excuse

for running off, and away she went, leaving the two in what she felt was, if an offer was to be made, the very snuggest place in the world in which to make it—a little ivy-covered nook in the farthest corner of the grounds, where nobody was likely to see them, thanks to an intervening shrubbery, which in spring and summer was a mass of sweetness and fragrance of lilac and syringa. They would be quiet enough there for a little time if they wanted to be quiet, and they would be so near other people, and the croquet players on the large lawn, that they could hear directly if they were wanted; but, indeed, you could not be very far from any one in the grounds of Beechside, which were of as limited extent as those of most seaside villas.

“I think we must go,” said Milly. “People will be wanting me. I’ve a great deal to do and to see to, you know, and I haven’t yet made acquaintance with the Bishop.”

She wanted to get away. Something told her that Audley Dale was in earnest and might want to keep her there. Was he going to propose as soon as he had come? He looked like it: he looked as if he meant it, and how very awkward it would be just then with so many people about, and she with so much to see to.

She had been expecting an offer from him for some time past, and had made up her mind to accept it when it came. Milly was a sensible girl, and had had offers before, and had put them by as gently and with as much regard to the feelings of those who made them as she knew how to exercise. But still, offers were trying things. "They put one out," said Milly to herself; "whether one says yes or no, they're awkward." She did not mean to say no this time, which perhaps might make the matter more trying still. There was so much expected of her; Mrs. Rushington would either think it her duty to

devote herself entirely to the Bishop, or she would suffer herself to be absorbed by a flirtation with one or other of her favourites, and in either case the majority of the guests would want some one else to look to them. People are not very *exigéante* at garden parties, and Mrs. Rushington's were always popular, but still, matters lay very much on Milly's shoulders, and she wanted to be about her work now.

"I do hope that whatever he's going to say, he'll let it be till people are nearly going," she thought. "I wish he'd let me get past him now, and—I do believe he's blocking up the way on purpose."

Something made Audley Dale desperate. Was it his cowardice? Had he resolved to rush on his fate and brave the worst? He had not had the slightest fear of there being any worst a little time ago, but now he had, and he felt as if he must know it. The sooner things were over the better; he would not go amongst all that crowd and

not feel, one way or another, sure of his fate. "If she won't have me I must put up with it," thought poor Audley; "perhaps it's no more than I deserve, but I feel as if I must know my fate at once."

"Milly," he said, "do stop, just a minute, I don't want to introduce you to my father just like anybody else, like Beatey Layton or Cary Burke—do n't you see?—do n't you know?"

"It is to be!" thought Milly. "Now, why he couldn't have put this off till a suitable time, I can't conceive. Men are such unreasonable creatures. Whoever would think of his making me a proposal just when I'm wanted in half-a-dozen places at once. There's mamma calling me. Oh, dear, if he'd only let me go!"

"I do n't know anything," she said, "but that mamma wants me. I think she is with your father. Had n't we better go?"

How she wished she had never entered that little harbour. Beatey and some other

girls had come in with her. They had been talking and laughing together, then the others had run off to get up a new game of croquet, and just as Beatey and she were about to follow, Audley Dale had, unluckily, met them. "It was all so unfortunate; everybody would know what was going on; one might just as well have it all said before them," thought Milly, "and only think, when I go out amongst them, they'll look at me as if to ask whether I'm really engaged or not."

"Not yet, not yet, Milly—only one minute longer."

He took her hand and held it very tightly, and there came a light and a tenderness into his face such as Milly had never seen there before. It moved her, in spite of her perplexities and her many cares as the mistress of the revels *de facto*. "If he would only have done it at any other time," she thought. It would have been so nice to have given herself up to the full enjoyment of such a moment—to have let

herself be loved, and have let him see that he was so too, but now there were a hundred conflicting cares and worries, all so commonplace and so little, and yet with such imperative claims upon her.

“Only one minute, Milly, I must speak to you that one minute.”

“Well, if it must be, it must,” she thought. “There’s mamma wondering where I am, and to-morrow I shall have such a lecture when she tells me of how overdone she has been, and how I vexed her by never being just where she wanted me. I dare say I shall hear that the Bishop will have thought it odd.” Then she looked at Audley not unkindly. “The sooner it is got over the better, I suppose,” she thought resignedly, “if he *will* do it.”

“Milly, I didn’t mean to speak to you like this—not all of a sudden, but it seems as if I cannot go on in this way any more. I must make myself under-

stood. I care for you so very much, I wish, oh! I do wish, Milly, when you see my father, it will be as one who cares for me a little."

"Poor fellow!" thought Milly, compassionately. "I'm certain there's mamma again. And, oh, dear, I can hear papa talking to Mr. Hurst about the collodion process; when he gets upon that there's nothing to be expected from him. I wonder whatever people are doing, with nobody to set them going, or keep them together," then she looked at Audley, and wished she had a little longer time in which to pity him.

"Don't you think you could like me, Milly; not for my deservings, Heaven knows, but just because I like you so very much?"

"I must get this over," thought Milly, "I'm certain I'm going to cry. Good gracious, only think of it! going back with red eyes! I wonder what I'd better say? how shall I make him understand? If one

had nothing to do but to say no, it would be so very easy, but then, no is just what I don't want to say."

She said nothing, but bent her head just a little, and for a moment was as happy, and as forgetful of all the realities of the little world within the garden walls as if she had been the most foolish, unpractical person going, instead of sensible, matter-of-fact Milly Lisdale, who had so many things to look after and take care of, her own mamma included. Just a moment, while her lover folded her in his arms and kissed her, and she forgot to trouble herself lest anyone should be looking; and the next, scared and frightened at her own forgetfulness, she was twisting herself out of his arms, and saying, "Let me go away, please, and don't come near me any more to-day. You don't know how much I have to think of and to see to, and I shall be fit for nothing if I fancy people are talking and wondering about me. Do n't say anything

to your papa till you get him home—no, nor to any one else—I can't bear it; but go to Mrs. Thornton—you and she always get on so well together, and I do n't care if you tell her everything. I do like her, if mamma does n't; and, for gracious sake, do n't—do n't do that again, and do keep away and do n't let us be talked about." Audley, in the extent of his happiness, had been kissing her once more, and she was now sufficiently recovered to feel horrified at his doing so. She looked at him now keenly, if affectionately; much in the same way that now and then she looked at her mamma. "I must have him taken care of," she thought, "and kept from making himself ridiculous." She slipped out of the arbour, and went straight to Mrs. Thornton, who was sitting on a bench where every one could see her, looking on at the croquet players, and turning back now and then to a middle-aged officer, who was doing his best to make himself agreea-

ble to her ; he was heavy, he was not particularly intelligent, and he had very little to say for himself, but he was a blessed change from such society as usually fell in her way. She was looking happy and animated, and her husband for once did not feel inclined to blame her for looking so, although in a sphere totally uncongenial to himself. At any rate, it was not Audley Dale to whom her smiles were given, and on whom her eyes were turned in all their lustre. That was something. He wished he could see her looking so happy at home, but at any rate it was a great deal that she was not looking happy with the man who had so disquieted him. After all, had he not a great deal to accuse himself of? Why had he not spoken sooner than he had done? And why had he judged so harshly when a few words seemed enough to set all this coil of misery right? He was as nearly happy as he had been at any time since the first month of his marriage, and might have continued so had it not been for Milly

Lisdale. She was full of her responsibilities and anxieties : Audley *must* be kept from distracting her. How should she get through her duties else ? She bent down, and whispered to Mrs. Thornton, " Please take care of Audley Dale, and for goodness' sake keep him from troubling me."

Then Mrs. Thornton knew what was expected of her, and knew, too, what had taken place, and she rejoiced that her hopes had so far been realized, and that Audley was likely to be so well provided for. She seized Milly's hand, and looked as if she would have liked to kiss her—as she would. She was a good-natured woman, and she liked this girl, who had been kind to her. " Send him to me, dear," she said. " I'll take care of him." And she did, keeping him at her side, and from troubling Milly ; and Mr. Thornton's peace of mind was at once overthrown, and he was more miserable than, on that bright day and in such a scene, it would be easy to conceive that any one could be.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BISHOP FEELS HIS CARES INCREASE.

MRS. RUSHINGTON kept the Bishop to herself for a time. She thought it due to him to do so, but after a while other claimants on her attention presented themselves, and his Lordship found, not a little to his relief, that he was left somewhat more to himself. His hostess had overpowered him. She had so much to say, such an affluence of words, she was so evidently bent on doing him honour, introducing every one to him, and making him feel that he was the hero of the day, when he would so very much rather have been

left to wander by himself, make acquaintance where he could, and sit or stroll as he pleased. But at last he was free from his hostess. She had done all that propriety required of her, she thought ; surely now she might give herself up a little to the enjoyment of the time ; and she did so, and Milly found her work enough for her, without giving more than a passing thought now and then to her lover. She looked once in a way at him, and saw that he was very well amused with Mrs. Thornton. Nothing was further from Milly's thoughts than any idea of jealousy. Mrs. Thornton was her friend. She liked her, notwithstanding her "odd ways" and her large eyes ; she was clever, and liked the books that Milly liked, amongst which, certainly, good novels figured—I really don't see why a girl should n't read a novel sometimes ; but at any rate I may frankly own that Milly liked to read them occasionally, as well as good books of

a more solid class. It was something to have any one like Mrs. Thornton to talk to. She found her amusing herself, and was not at all disposed to quarrel with Audley for finding her amusing too. If only Mr. Thornton could have taken the same rational view of matters that this sensible little lady did, what an immense amount of misery he would have spared himself—to say nothing of other people. Nature had given this man so many good things; why had she not added thereto the virtue of common-sense; that pleasant, easy, common sense which does not expect too much from any one—above all, which does not lead us to expect every one is to be cast in the same mould as ourselves, and see with the same eyes. He was miserable enough in his way this bright afternoon; but the poor Bishop, after another and less trying fashion, was not quite happy, either. He thought he would not be monopolized by any one again, and therefore took care not

to join any group, or attach himself to any particular person. But he wandered about the not very extensive grounds, making his own observations, and, after a fashion of his own, taking note of the peculiarities of such clergy of his diocese as were there assembled.

It was a good opportunity ; the clerical element formed such a large ingredient in the society of Wearmouth, that to any one who wanted to study the clerical character perhaps as amusing as any other in its very various manifestations—that garden party offered many advantages. But the Bishop was not disposed to be amused by what he saw ; indeed, before long he felt himself greatly aggrieved by what he saw and heard. These men were there, all at their ease, and, notwithstanding his presence, not at all restrained in showing themselves as they were. Every one always *did* feel so easy and so at home at Mrs. Rushington's, that not even a bishop could

congeal them into formality, or make them remember that there were things that in such a presence should not be said, and opinions which it might be as well not to utter till they had some idea what *his* opinions were. There was a little knot of them together—at any social gathering given a certain number of professionals of any class, they will get together, and they *will* talk “shop,” and I think the clergy in this respect are greater sinners than either medical men or lawyers. Soldiers don’t count when, as in this case, they all come from the same barracks, and of course have thoroughly exhausted each other’s mental resources, whatever they may be, before they meet on other ground. But here was a group of the clergy of the place, and the Bishop, unhappily for himself, sat near; so near, that although unperceived, he could not help hearing every word that passed. Some of them had appeared to him before as wanting in that due regard to propriety,

that suave, bland decorum of dress and manner which had always seemed to him so indispensable in his order; his son was not the only clergyman present who had appeared anxious to drop every vestige of his cloth; several of those there assembled had appeared quite as anxious as Maurice or Audley could have been not to show themselves in "uniform." If it had not been for Mrs. Rushington pointing out the different individuals to him who composed the group, and telling him their several designations, it is certain he would never have imagined that one half of them were entitled to place "Reverend" before their names—they were very irreverent now, and if they did talk "shop," it was in such a manner that it would have jarred less on his nerves had they left it alone altogether.

They had got on the subject of their schools. Maurice Dale, who had joined the group, had started the topic. Practically he

knew less about the working of his schools than any clergyman in the diocese. He did his best, and he spent his money, but everything else had to be left to the master and mistress, and so on the whole the schools at Tring were not a particular success ; but Maurice was great on the subject of schools in general, would have had them as universal as taxes, as free as air ; and, considering that this was some years before the Education League or Union had started, he deserves all the credit that is due to the pioneers of their age. Mr. Hartley had followed his lead, and was talking away fluently enough ; the Bishop would have known *him*—even if he had not been pointed out to him by Mrs. Rushington as the “ Rector of Wye, and the oddest creature that ever breathed”—by the euphemisms to which his son had alluded. He talked slang—he could n’t help it—but he talked splendid English, too, when he liked ; but those objectionable modes of expression gave a

piquancy to his discourse that would have delighted any hearer but the Bishop. He was a tall, slight man, with a thin, pale face, of good family, and, as the Bishop well knew, his living and his private property together amounted to an income of two thousand a year, and if a Jew clothesman had been asked the value of every article he had on he would perhaps have put down the sum total at five and thirty shillings. He certainly wore a neck-tie, and it was not black, but it would have been a perversion of words to have called it white, and it was limp and tumbled. The Bishop could have groaned as he looked at that neck-tie and thought of the position the Rev. Septimus Hartley held, and the duties that were expected of him, the example he ought to show, and the position he was expected to maintain. After such laxity in his attire it was not to be wondered at if he was equally lax in other matters, and it did not at all surprise the Bishop to hear that his views

on school management were as heterodox as those of Maurice. The Rev. Theobald Rudford was one of the party. From the Rev. Theobald the Bishop had at first sight expected great things. His attire was faultless, his neck-tie speckless; let him have been seen anywhere and you could have taken him for nothing but what he was — a clergyman of the Established Church; a little high in his views, but not to the point of intolerance; a gentlemanly, well-bred man, perfectly aware of his position and of what was due to it. The Bishop's heart had fairly warmed to him, till he had seen that the Rev. Theobald, though nearly fifty, with a wife and a couple of daughters, had evidently come to that garden party with the intention of enjoying himself as much as if he had been the youngest officer from the barracks. He played croquet *con amore*—as he flirted—he told riddles and anecdotes, laughed, made jokes, and generally comported himself in anything but a

clerical manner. The Bishop was not austere, no one could say that, but he liked a clergyman to remember himself and his cloth in something more than in his garments, and Mr. Rudford had joined in the conversation now with a fusillade of riddles which played like fireworks round the heavy batteries of the other speakers.

They were discussing, now, the benefit of the Scriptures as a class-book. Mr. Rudford approved of them. He didn't bring arguments in favour of his views, but he brought jokes, which amused the others, if they did not convince them. Mr. Street, who was High Church, too, but much broader than he was high, was not of the same way of thinking. "A great many of those old legends," he said, "unless very carefully explained, will do children rather more harm than good. I do n't know but what when you come to tell them of Joshua bidding the sun stand still, or the world rising out of nothing in six days, you might

as well give them 'Hop-o'-my-Thumb,' or 'Cinderella,' at once—not as diluted by Cruikshank, though. The old Teutonic myths will do them as much good as the Jewish ones—rather more—they've more imagination in them, and less bloodthirstiness."

Could the Bishop believe his ears? He had heard of the Broad Church, as he had of the broad gauge, and, practically, knew as much of one as of the other. He had never been brought in such contact with it, before. What did Mr. Street mean by holding such views? How had he got into the sheep-fold, where he was now disporting himself so very like a robber? He looked keenly at him. There was nothing of the robber in Mr. Street's appearance. A well-made, dapper little man, who perhaps, by most people, would have been taken rather for a rising barrister, or a solicitor with plenty of business, than what he was—keen, shrewd, clever-looking, but with nothing very dreadful about him. Surely the others would take this matter up. Such

sayings as these were not to be passed over with indifference. They none of them looked very much startled, however, with the exception of Mr. Thornton, who had just come up to the group, and who, in spite of his own private misery, would have answered Mr. Street, had not Maurice Dale observed—

“The little wretches are always losing their places. They cut a chapter down to three parts of its length, and whenever they come to a verse with a few hard names, they’re safe to skip it. I always find it so with mine.”

“We can’t better the Bible, either, as a lesson-book,” said Mr. Rudford. “Does any one know, by-the-bye, what was the first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark?”

No one seemed inclined to guess; but Mr. Thornton now broke in. His tone, at least, if unduly solemn, was a relief to the Bishop’s ears. He was a wretched man. He had come towards the group to be a little out of the

sight of what was making his wretchedness almost into madness ; but he could not keep silent now. What was *his* hurt that he should think of it, when others, the sworn servants of the altar, were treating high and sacred things so irreverently ? How could he stand dumb as a sheep, even though the ruin of his home and hearth was impending ? Surely there was a worse ruin now before him.

“ We have no right to speak of this book as we are doing,” he said, “ no right to ask whether or no it is suitable for a lesson-book. Enough for us that it is the one book, above all others, for the young souls entrusted to our charge to learn—line upon line, precept upon precept, work it into them, word by word, and verse by verse, till it becomes part of their very lives—familiar to them as the air they breathe ; useful as the bread they eat — that is what we have to do with regard to this book. It is no question of expediency,

or of fitness ; of hard words and difficult meanings—it is the one food we must give these young starvelings, wanting which they perish, and we shall be asked for them, and have no account to render.”

In season and out of season he was always ready to speak ; but his words seemed out of season, now, even to the Bishop. “Let your moderation be known unto all men,” was his favourite text, and he had certainly always been moderate in all things. “The man ought to be a Dissenter,” he thought, “if he talks like that. I wonder if he was originally brought up for one ?” In truth Harold Thornton would perhaps have spoken less vehemently, and more to the purpose, had it not been for the keenness of the pain that was torturing him. He had to speak, he had to forget his own trouble ; but still his anguish made him speak fiercely and bitterly, in despite of himself, or, at least, as he would not otherwise have done at such a time and place. For a moment his earnest-

ness silenced the men around him ; then Mr. Rudford said, in his usual bland, pleasant voice, with conciliation and good temper in every tone—

“ Yes, we must have something to appeal to—something better than a mere moral code on the ‘ Tommy Goodchild ’ system. There are vices a master must check, and he wants a higher authority than his own to appeal to. That’s where he would never get on, unless we allowed him to infuse a very strong religious sentiment into his teaching. How else is he to deal with a thief, or a liar, for example ? ”

“ I should say give him a good hiding,” said the Rev. Maurice.

“ Quoting the Scriptures won’t do it,” said the Rev. Septimus Hartley. “ If a boy’s born a cad all the sermonising in the world won’t make him better. I do n’t think when I was at Harrow any of us stole. I suppose we were too well off : but if a fellow lied—and some of them did—the master

who took notice of it would tell him it was a blackguard thing, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. If he'd quoted Scripture, the boy would have thought him a muff. If he'd sermonized in any other fashion he would have said it was rot. But that sort of appeal to his better feelings generally settled the business. A fellow does n't like being called that kind of thing twice over."

"But it strikes me," said the Rev. Theophilus Street, "that it would n't be of much use to appeal to the class with whom we have to deal on the score of blackguardism."

"That's just what I say," said Maurice Dale. "After all, in such cases a hiding settles the matter most satisfactorily."

Milly Lisdale came up then. "Mr. Rudford, I can't have you talking about all sorts of grave matters here. You know you are wanted everywhere. Please come and make yourself useful at croquet. The game

always seems so flat if we don't have you in it."

Mr. Rudford went off to where a bevy of young ladies were awaiting him. Talk of curates, there never was one half so popular as the good-tempered, gentlemanly Rector, with his fifty years. "It's a sin for you to keep away from us," said Milly. "You know very well you're my right hand in everything. Now, please make yourself useful here."

Which Mr. Rudford did, after his own fashion, by firing off jokes, riddles, and stories, till croquet was at a stand-still, and all who had got together to form another game could do nothing but listen to him. Never mind, Milly was satisfied. They were all happy. Mamma, too, was well employed. She had the heavy officer upon whom but a little time before Mrs. Thornton had been turning such languishing eyes. He could n't talk, but he could listen, or seem to do so ; and she was pouring forth

a string of reminiscences of their continental journeyings. She liked this officer. Stout as he was, he waltzed divinely, and waltzing was, next to flirting, Mrs. Rushington's weakness. She did n't approve of it for young people, but there were a great many things young people might not do which matrons could, according to Mrs. Rushington. Milly liked square dances as well as round ones, otherwise she would have followed her mamma's example, instead of her precepts. Beatey, who was as fond of the *valse à deux temps* as Mrs. Rushington herself, had got into trouble more than once on that account since her stay at Beechside, Mrs. Rushington thinking it needful to keep a keener supervision over her daughter's friend than over her daughter. Milly looked at her mamma now, and was satisfied. "She will do. Captain Derge will keep her amused for the rest of the day. Papa's going on nicely, making himself agreeable to those three old ladies.

Well, that's as much as I could expect of him. Where's Beatey? Good little creature! Keeping those heavy Tomkinsons going, and I know she's put out, because Temple Masters doesn't put in an appearance. Yes, I think people are comfortable; and there's Mrs. Thornton keeping Audley from teasing me. What a blessing, to be sure, that she's here to take him off my hands!"

Not an unmixed blessing, if Milly Lisdale had only known all. If she could but have told how, even when out of his sight, Henrietta Thornton's husband was dwelling on the looks and the words she was bestowing upon the man by her side—how he seemed to hear the one, and see the other, even though he kept persistently away, and said to himself that he would not go near her lest he should outrage decorum, and sin in his anger against the conventionalities that society required of its mentors.

"The liar! the double-faced, equivocating

liar!" he said to himself. "Only yesterday, and he told me I should have nothing to dread from him; thanked me for dealing so mercifully with him, and lo! here he is, parading his admiration for that wretched woman even before my eyes, as if he gloried in her weakness and my possible dishonour! And I was so happy; but a few moments ago so happy; and now all the airy fabric I had erected is levelled to the dust—to the dust, where he will bring that woman who is weak enough to believe in him. If I go too near, I shall forget myself. I feel as if I could strike him to the earth, and I dare not so openly disgrace my calling—no, nor her, poor wretch, though she has little claim to pity at my hands."

The little coterie had broken up when Milly Lisdale had drawn away Mr. Rudford, and Harold Thornton wandered aimlessly along. A turn of the shrubbery brought him to the embowered seat where

the Bishop was resting in the shade of the lilacs and laburnums, and without noticing the aproned dignitary who sat at one end of the seat, he flung himself on the other. To another man it would have seemed a desirable opportunity of making the acquaintance of his spiritual lord—once, such a chance would have filled his wife's heart with delight, in the hope that he would profit by it, and that great things might come of it by-and-bye ; now, if she had seen him, she would have known that nothing of the kind could come, and the utmost she would have hoped, would have been that he would not make himself ridiculous, and frighten the Bishop by his desperate earnestness—which was pretty well what he had done already.

The Bishop looked at him as he sat down ; at the thin pale face, the tender nervous mouth, but which yet had such an ominous power of compression in it ;

at the thin hair, grey already at the temples ; at the high narrow forehead, and the fire of the unquiet restless eyes.

“ I hope he’s not an enthusiast,” thought the Bishop, “ but he looks like one ; there are a great many dangerous things going about now-a-days, but enthusiasm always has been, and always will be, the most dangerous of all.”

He thought at first of getting up and walking away. He did not altogether like being in company with this man ; even the very contiguity made him feel uncomfortable ; but the seat suited him ; the back sloped pleasantly, and the lilacs and laburnums gave a grateful shade, without intruding themselves, as green things sometimes will intrude, unpleasantly. And he was tired ; Mrs. Rushington had walked him round and round, and lionized him, and pointed some people out, and introduced others, and talked and expatiated and dilated till his head went fairly

round. He was glad of this rest; the place was out of every one's way, and through the trees he could see what was going on, if he cared to be so amused, without being annoyed by too much observation himself. No, it was not worth while to leave it just because that unhappy-looking man had sat down near him, but he did wish it had been anybody else; even Mr. Street, with his heretical doctrines, or Mr. Hartley, with his euphemisms, would have been better than one who was much fitter for a conventicle than a church.

Presently Mr. Thornton addressed him. The poor man, in his intense earnestness, could not stop there, and not talk to his Bishop. Heaven knows, with little thought enough of any possible gain to himself in so doing, but such an opportunity as this had been the wish of his heart ever since he came into the county. There were so many wrongs to right,

so many shortcomings of the past to atone for; so much evil to amend; why should he not at once address his spiritual lord, (the man, who—if, unlike his predecessor, he had the will—had certainly the power to take at least some steps in the right direction,) and tell him something of what was so greatly needed?

Poor Bishop! If he had only known what was menacing him now, he would certainly have left that seat, comfortable as he found it.

Then Mr. Thornton began to speak, introducing himself as the Rector of St. Hilda, and telling the Bishop what a good thing it was he had come amongst them—so much had been hoped for from his advent.

“Yes,” said the Bishop blandly. “I think that sermon next Sunday will do good. The Sailors’ Widows’ Fund seems an excellent cause to support. I shall be very happy if any assistance of mine can be of benefit in the matter.”

“ Ah, we want help in a thousand ways besides. Souls are perishing around us, and we, who should be ready to save and help, are contending and disputing amongst one another, or ignoring the very foundations of the faith which yet it is incumbent on us to teach others. These are hard days to live in—so much needed, so much wanted ; it seems so impossible to fulfil the thousandth part that is required, and yet if we fail—if we fail—if through weakness or inertness we fall short, who shall say what irremediable misery may be caused thereby !”

“ One’s responsibilities are heavy ;” said the Bishop, “ distressingly so at times.”

Mr. Thornton resumed, “ In this town alone there is room for half-a-dozen more churches, even if in those now existing the work appointed were duly done. Sometimes in my little parish I seem overdone—overdone by the weight of work laid on me, and yet it is but a type of the

whole county—nay, of the whole kingdom ; a seething mass of ignorance and heathendom—souls lost to Christ, ears that never heard of God. I do not think, my lord, that of those who stand in such high places as yourself there ever was more needed than there is now. If I, with my small stewardship, sometimes fear that I shall fall short when my reckoning is claimed, what must it be to those like you ?”

The Bishop felt uncomfortable, and a little concerned for Mr. Thornton ; he did not feel inclined to say that much learning had made him mad, but he thought it not impossible that much piety had. Piety was an excellent thing in its way ; he had always thought so, done his best to inculcate it in his sermons, and, without presuming too much on his own merits, he felt he might say, also in his life. But there might be too much of a good thing, an over care for others’ souls which might endanger one’s own sanity ; of all the

“isms” which had entered the Church and were doing so much harm now-a-days, surely the worst, or at least the most dangerous, was fanaticism.

“Poor man!” thought the Bishop, and edged a little further away. “Means well, I’ve no doubt, but is perfectly carried away by excess of zeal. I wonder where he was educated—St. Bee’s or Durham are more likely to send out men of this stamp than either Oxford or Cambridge.”

There the Bishop was wrong—if he had kept himself as well posted up in University matters as he should have done, he would have known that Oxford claimed Harold Thornton as one of her sons, that he had taken his degree with the highest honours, that he might have droned away his life pleasantly enough as a Fellow, had he so chosen, have enriched himself as a Don of the highest classical reputation by taking pupils, have certainly had, in good time, a well-paid professorship in his Alma

Mater offered him, had not a sense of duty called him away, had he not felt that not *thus* could he do his Lord's work, that with souls not merely hungering for the bread of life, while there was no man ready to give it them, but, far worse, perishing for food, and yet unconscious of their need of it, lost in vice, and sin and darkness, some one must go forth and try and rouse them—some one who felt that this *was* his work above all other, and who was ready to do it for the sheer love of God and good, without troubling himself as to whether or no his material recompense in this world would be a little more or less. So he had gone forth—so he had worked. A scholar, who had put his scholarship away from him whenever, with the untaught creatures whom he had to deal with, it had stood in his way ; a gentleman, who had put from him the likings, almost the instincts of his class, and gone where he met with foul smells and loathsome sights, coarse words,

unseemly jokes, rudeness, irreverence and sometimes insult. A man of refined and intellectual tastes who, as far as he could, had crushed them—dealt with himself as hardly as any ascetic monk of old—and devoted the money and the time which their indulgence would have cost him to the furtherance of ends that he esteemed as infinitely higher. No wonder his bishop failed to understand him, especially now when his utterances were sharpened and embittered by the pain gnawing at his heart. Harold Thornton was an anachronism ; he should have lived in the times when men went to the stake or rotted in prisons for their principles ; his fervour, his self-denial, the glorious half craze of his enthusiasm were out of date now, it was not his bishop only who looked on him with a pitying wonder. Well, thank God, in the Church and out of the Church, there are men as much behind (or before ?) their time as was ever Harold Thornton at his maddest ; perhaps the Bishop, too, only after quite another manner,

was nearly as much out of fashion as the unhappy soul beside him. With all our materialism, our steam engines, our machinery, our wonderfully complicated civilization, I think we are a little in earnest too. We say strange things, and startling ones, but are they not sometimes the outcome of a spirit that will no longer seek to gain heaven by dull decorum—mete out religion by rule and line, or say to the poor soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness, “Thus far in thy search for it shalt thou go, and no further.”

“I think things have been suffered to fall a little behind in some places,” said the Bishop. “My predecessor suffered greatly from ill-health, but it is of no use being premature. We must be so very careful in our movements, or we shall do more harm than good.”

“One or two of us have been doing what we can in this town,” said Mr. Thornton. “I should like to tell your lordship a little of our movements. They have not met

with much success as yet, but some of us are new to the work, and the population with whom we have to deal is a difficult one to understand, with the crudest notions of right and wrong, the most elementary ideas, or none at all, of sacred things—but we have made a beginning—yes, I think we have made a beginning, though only on a small scale.” And then he began to speak of open air preaching, ragged schools in the poorest parts of the town, home missions to its dark and narrow alleys, bible women, and scripture readers, weekly services, house to house visitation, prayer-meetings, midnight services; till the Bishop’s head was fairly turned—the Dissenters could have done no worse—or better—and Mr. Thornton wound up a recital of almost superhuman efforts, which must have cost more, both in time and money, than the Bishop would have thought could possibly have been found in such a place, by observing: “And it is all so little! When I think of the vice and the paganism raging around

us, I feel as if we were trying to shut yonder ocean out when it is raging its fiercest by such embankments as children build of sand."

"I think you are doing a great deal, a very great deal, Mr. Thornton," said the Bishop, encouragingly. "But you should take care of your own health. It seems to me you are working too hard (killing himself," thought the Bishop, "I believe these kind of people always do; but, bless me, I hope I sha'n't be expected to encourage that sort of thing in the diocese. I am persuaded it would do more harm than good)."

"One can ask no better than to spend and be spent in such a cause," was the answer, "if only one could see some little result of all one's labours. Sometimes that seems too much to hope for—as if one must be satisfied to work in the dark and never have one glimpse of light to show how the work has progressed. One must wait till

the end—if only one could think that then—*then* one might see some small result for all one's toil; one sheaf garnered for the harvest; one soul gathered within the golden gates! and yet sometimes my heart turns sick and faint within me, when I think that even that may be denied—that at the last—at the last I shall find I, like so many more, have been but an unprofitable servant—a lifetime's labour lost, the sum total of the reckoning I shall have to give!"

There was a light in his eyes as he spoke; a hungry, despairing look that had sometimes come there since that serious illness of his. He was never satisfied with himself, never content with what he had done. It was almost a monomania, this unquiet conscience; and his domestic misery aggravated it." If a man cannot serve those of his own household, whom, then, can he serve?" he would sometimes ask himself, despairingly: and now, even as he sat there, his wife came by, leaning on Audley Dale's arm, and

looking brighter, happier, younger, than he had seen her look for months.

If the Bishop had been keener sighted than he was, he would have learned something from the involuntary twitch of the hand, the passionately-compressed lips of the man by him. After all, it was not heaven only that could move him. But he saw nothing of this, only a handsome woman, who made him an elaborate, a *too* elaborate, curtsy — a little of her stage training would cling to Mrs. Thornton still — as his son introduced her to him. The Bishop became gracious as he heard her name. He saw a ready means of extricating himself from the over-zealous man by his side, and showing a little kindly consideration, too. “I have been having a long talk to your husband, Mrs. Thornton,” he said. “I think he overworks himself. You must take care of him—you must, indeed. Overwork in anything—even in our sacred office—is injurious, and some-

times defeats the very ends it is meant to gain. You will have Mr. Thornton ill, if you do n't mind, and nobody ought to be ill in this bracing Wearmouth air."

Then the Bishop walked away, feeling satisfied that he had been very gracious in the matter, but hoping devoutly he should never see Mr. Thornton again. Rather Mr. Street, with his myths, Mr. Hartley, with his slang, than that. Maurice had tried his father sorely ; but oh ! if he had been like Mr. Thornton, would not that have been a sorer trial still ? Then he thought of Mrs. Thornton. "Showy looking woman. Wherever did he meet with her ? The last lady in the world I should ever have taken for a clergyman's wife. But a man so eccentric as Mr. Thornton is so likely to have done just what no other would do even in his marriage."

END OF VOL. I.

